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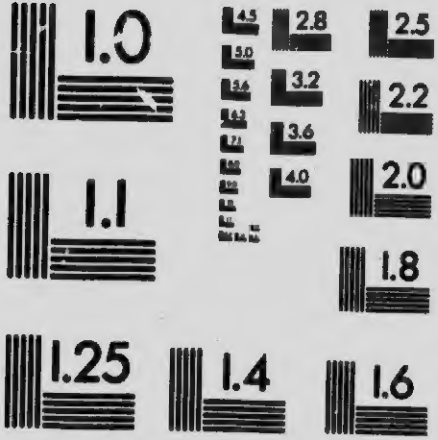

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1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14t SA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

Oh! Christina!

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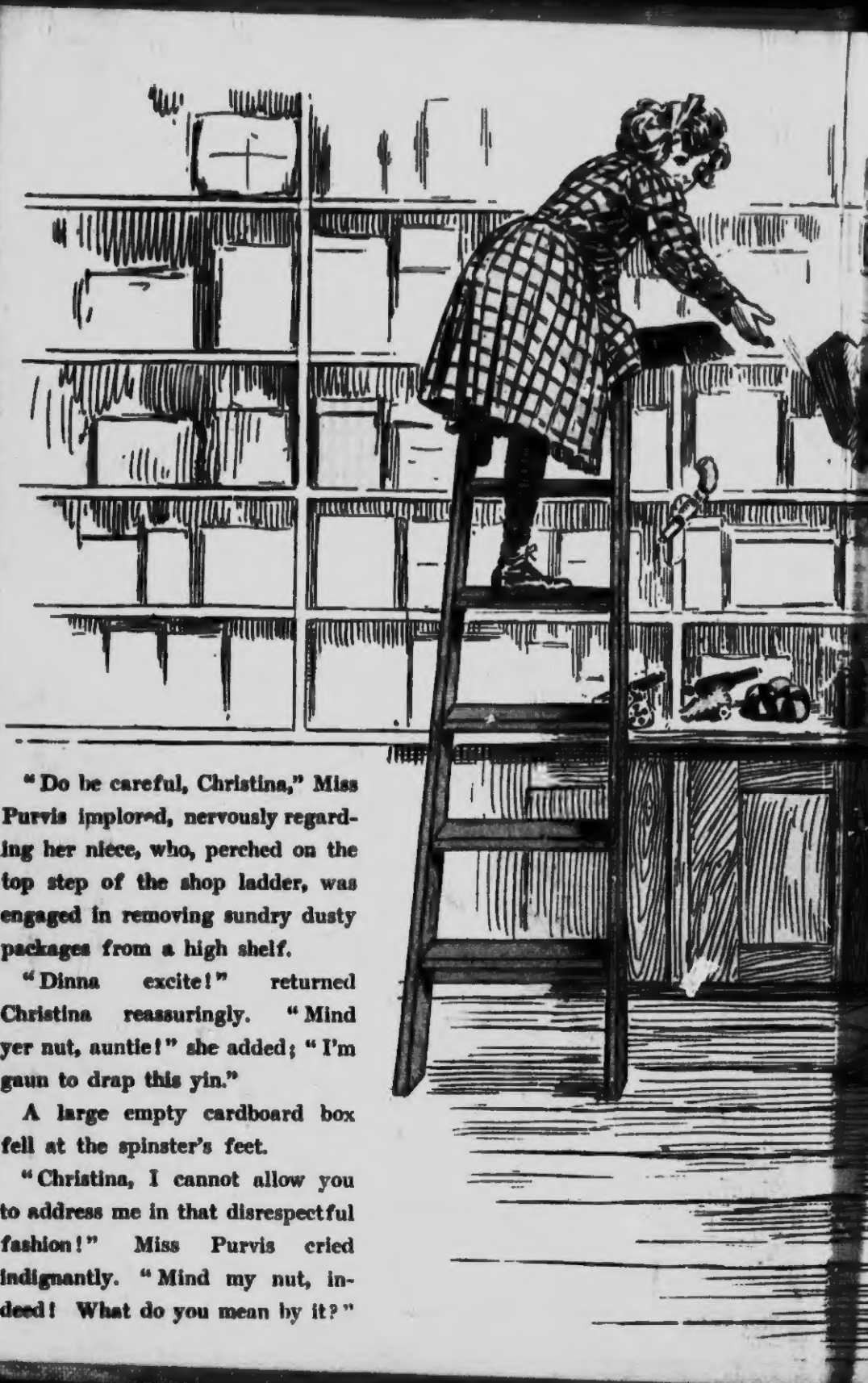

"Do be careful, Christina," Miss Purvis implored, nervously regarding her niece, who, perched on the top step of the shop ladder, was engaged in removing sundry dusty packages from a high shelf.

"Dinna excite!" returned Christina reassuringly. "Mind yer nut, auntie!" she added; "I'm gaun to drap this yin."

A large empty cardboard box fell at the spinster's feet.

"Christina, I cannot allow you to address me in that disrespectful fashion!" Miss Purvis cried indignantly. "Mind my nut, indeed! What do you mean by it?"

~~Ma mother~~

~~frat~~

~~Ayi~~

Laura A Seale

OH! CHRISTINA!

"Miss Purvis gave her twelve-year-old niece a frown of disapproval."

OH! CHRISTINA!

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BY

J. J. BELL

AUTHOR OF "WHITHER THOU GOEST," "WEE MACGREEGOR," ETC.

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO
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TO

MY SISTERS

SUSIE AND SARA

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" Ye can send twa dizzen assortit. . . . Them wi' the big green jools."

OH! CHRISTINA!

I

THE INCORRIGIBLE

FROM behind the counter, with its little piles of periodicals and trays of picture postcards, Miss Purvis gave her twelve-year-old niece a frown of disapproval.

"Have you delivered the extra papers at the manse, Christina?" She spoke as severely as her peculiarly soft voice would allow her.

"Uh-ha!" said Christina, with an almost choked utterance.

"Why didn't you tidy yourself before you went to the manse?"

"I forgot."

Miss Purvis sighed. "I hope Mrs. Beaton didn't see you in such a state?" she said.

"Ay, she seen me," mumbled the girl, smiling.

"Oh, dear me!" Miss Purvis made a gesture of despair. "And I'm sure I've told you a hundred times not to say *seen* when you mean *saw*. Try to remember that in future, Christina."

"Uh-ha!"

"Don't say *uh-ha!* What have you got in your mouth?"

"Jujubes."

"Jujubes! More than one jujube?"

"Uh-ha!"

"Wh—where did you get jujúbes?"

"Frae Mistress Beaton."

"And you put them all in your mouth at once?" Miss Purvis asked in a tone of disgust.

"I jist got five frae her. . . . Ye canna taste yin * jujube proper. Is the tea no' ready yet?" Christina's speech gained in freedom and clarity as the jujubes dissolved.

"There will be no tea," said Miss Purvis firmly, "for a girl with dirty hands and untidy hair."

"A' richt, auntie. I'll tosh† masel' up in twa shakes," said Christina cheerfully, and passed through the glazed and curtained door at the back of the shop.

Miss Purvis groaned as she adjusted the wick of the lamp burning above the counter. Christina was certainly a heavy trial to the gentle—and very genteel—middle-aged spinster. Orphaned and quite unprovided for, Christina had been brought from Glasgow six months ago, and ever since then her benefactress had been endeavouring to improve her manners in general, and her grammar and mode of speech in particular. Too frequently she had been driven to despair by the girl's lack of response to her

* *Yin*=one. † *Tosh up*=tidy up.

efforts. Miss Purvis, though compelled by circumstances to earn a modest living in a west coast village, belonged to Edinburgh, a fact which she never forgot. "Manners first and money afterwards" might have been her motto.

Miss Purvis was still under forty, of medium height, very slender and rather prim. But for her primness she might have been deemed attractive. Most of the villagers were inclined to regard her as "stuck-up"—the last thing she had any intention of being, desiring only to be lady-like, which was a natural enough desire, seeing that she was a lady at heart.

She drew her chair near to the counter, and bent over the latest number of *The Hearth-rug Novelist*, which every week, for the sum of one penny, gives its readers a work of fiction, "equal in every respect to the average novel sold at six shillings"; a page of "Housekeeping Hints"; two pages of advice to worried lovers; a paper pattern of a baby's garment, and a chance of winning almost anything from a 20 h.p. motor-car to a xylonite thimble.

She resumed her reading at the point where Christina's entrance had interrupted her—the point at which the bold, black-bearded, Bulgarian baron was assuring the lovely young English heiress, whom he had abducted and lodged in his ancient castle, that he would soon tame her haughty spirit.

But somehow the baron was much less ter-

rifying, the heiress much less pathetic, than Miss Purvis had found them ten minutes earlier. Miss Purvis was depressed; she was, moreover, suffering from a slight headache.

Passing her hand over her brow, from which the brown hair was drawn tightly back, she reflected, as she had done every other day for many years, that she did not take sufficient exercise. Her reflection was probably not unreasonable, considering that she rarely went out of doors except to church on Sundays. For a long time she had been intending to follow the instructions given in a ladies' magazine, wherein a young woman was depicted in many unusual attitudes, each of which was stated to be helpful to some part of the human frame and to the system generally. But as yet Miss Purvis had been unable to bring herself to lie, kicking, on the floor, or to stand on one foot, swinging the other, for five minutes. She had a horror of looking ridiculous, even in private, and the only exercise which she felt she could carry out with dignity was one specially prescribed for a person possessing a double chin, which Miss Purvis had not.

"Want of exercise and, perhaps, want of excitement," she sighed to herself, or rather to the Bulgarian baron, whose dissipated but noble countenance stared at her from the page before her.

During the last three years Miss Purvis had experienced but two incidents which might be

truly called exciting. Once her kitchen chimney had gone on fire; once she had fallen from the fourth step of the shop ladder along with a package containing a dozen doll's tea-sets. So far Christina's company had meant a good deal of anxiety and some irritation, but it had produced no episodes which could be described as stirring in the mildest meaning of the word.

"Yes," thought the spinster, absently dabbing at the baron with the rusty pen she had picked up, "I do believe it's excitement, even more than exercise, that I require."

"Here, auntie!" called Christina from the door of the back room.

Miss Purvis started. "What is wrong?" she called in reply, half-rising.

"Naethin'. Am I to wash ma face?"

"Certainly."

"It's no' dirty."

"The face should always be washed before meals," said Miss Purvis primly. Once upon a time she had dreamed of being a schoolmistress.

"I think it needs washin' mair *efter* meals," remarked Christina, combing her abundant fair hair in the doorway.

"Wash your face at once!" cried Miss Purvis, trying to speak sternly.

"Hooch, ay!" Christina replied lightly, and disappeared.

"Christina!"

The girl returned to the doorway. "What's up?" she asked pleasantly.

"What did you say when I told you to wash your face at once?" her aunt demanded.

"Hooch, ay!"

"Well, don't let me hear you using these words again, Christina."

"They're in a comic song, auntie."

"Well, you must not repeat them. They aren't nice words for a girl to use. I forbid you to repeat them."

"What wey?"

"Because I forbid you."

"A' richt. Keep yer hair on, auntie." The girl turned away, laughing.

"Christina!"

"Hullo?"

"What—what do you mean by such impudence?" cried Miss Purvis, now really indignant.

"I didna mean for to be impiddent. I jist meant——"

"Where do you learn such expressions?"

"At the schule. I jist meant——"

"Go and wash your face at once!"

Miss Purvis, with a hopeless sigh, bent once more over her novelette.

"A' richt," said her niece, as cheerfully as ever, and banged the door behind her. It did not catch, however, and presently Miss Purvis heard the sound of running water, to which soon was added a shrill whistling.

"Christina!"

"Hullo?"

"Stop that whistling!"

"Hooch, ay!—I mean, a' richt!"

A couple of minutes went past.

"Christina!"

"Hullo?"

"Have you finished washing?"

"Uh-ha!"

"Turn off the water, and don't say *uh-ha!*"

"Hooch—a' richt!"

The sound of water ceased, and for a little while silence reigned in the back room.

Then Christina began to sing.

Miss Purvis put a finger in each ear and sought to concentrate her thoughts on the conversation of the swarthy baron and his fair prisoner. It was past the usual hour for tea, and Miss Purvis was wearying for a cup, but she had not the energy required for its preparation.

"*Wretch!*" she read, "*you have decoyed me here under false pretences. But your triumph shall be short-lived. Last night my secret message would be in the hands of the British ambassador, and already I hear the sound of*——"

At this point it was necessary to turn the page, and Miss Purvis unplugged one of her ears. Whereupon she clearly heard—

"*Stop yer ticklin', ticklin', ticklin',*
Stop yer ticklin', Jock!"

"Christina!"

"Hullo?"

"Don't sing that dreadful song!"

"A' richt."

But the girl was not long silent. Stunned with horror, the aunt listened to the following—

"Fause Maggie Jordan! She's made ma life a burden!
I'm no' fit to leeve, an' I'm gey sweirt to dee.*
She's left me a' forlorrun! I wish I'd ne'er been borrun,
Since fause Maggie Jordan's gaed an' jiltit me!—
Tarara!—"

"Oh, Christina, Christina!" cried Miss Purvis, finding speech at last; "where did you learn such songs?"

"In Glesca, auntie. A laddie learnt them to me. I ken a lot mair."

"Oh, but you mustn't sing them! You must try to forget them."

"Hoo that?"

"Because—because I say so. Don't you understand that it's wrong for a girl to know such songs?" Miss Purvis nearly went on to remark on her niece's up-bringing, but she managed to stop her tongue in time. Thus far she had never uttered a single reflection on the girl's parents and the Glasgow aunt, who had afterwards made but a doubtful guardian, but often she had been shocked by the indications of their neglect.

"Promise me, Christina," she said solemnly, "never to sing such songs again."

"Hooch, ay! I promise."

* *Sweirt*=unwilling.

Miss Purvis let the forbidden expression of assent pass as a customer came into the shop.

"Fine nicht," said the customer. "I was wantin' a leed pincil."

"Yes," she returned, producing a box.

"What's the price o' thur yins?"

"Ha'pennies each."

"Aw!" The customer, an elderly man, picked out a pencil and examined it minutely under the lamp. "Ye can get three o' thur for a penny in the toon," he observed after much deliberation.

"Can you?" said Miss Purvis, a little wearily. "I'm afraid I couldn't afford to give more than two. They are good pencils."

The man submitted the pencil to another long and searching examination. Then he laid it down and turned to the door.

"Aweel, I'll think ower it," he said. "Gude nicht."

A young woman came in and purchased a "Park Lane Cabinet of Choice Stationery," price threepence, after inspecting every variety of notepaper in the shop.

"Is these the only kinds ye've got?" she remarked again and again.

"I'll see if there's nothing else," returned the spinster, and ascended and descended the shop ladder till she was slightly giddy.

When the young woman had departed, Miss Purvis sat down, placed her elbows on the

counter and her head in her hands. If she could only rouse herself to make the tea!

"Hey, auntie!"

Christina was standing in the doorway, her face shining, her hair in order, her eyes dancing.

Miss Purvis sat up. She tried to smile her approval, but it was a very wan smile.

Then, suddenly, there was wafted towards her a whiff of that delicious odour which comes from bread just toasted, or being toasted.

"Christina!" she exclaimed, getting up.

"I hear ye."

"You don't mean to say you've been so clever as to make the tea."

"Uh-ha!"

"Oh, I never was so glad in my life!" cried the spinster. "It was real good of you, dear."

"Hooch, ay!" said Christina, highly pleased with herself.

II

THE GEOGRAPHY LESSON

"WHAT for are ye greetin', auntie? Is it an awfu' sad story ye're at?"

Miss Purvis looked up from the novelette, and wiped her eyes hurriedly and in a somewhat shamefaced manner.

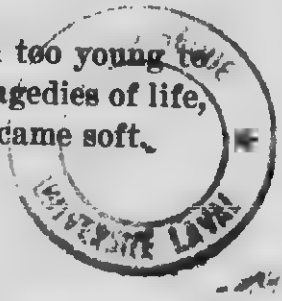
"I—I fear I've got a cold in my head, Christina," she said apologetically, unable to meet her niece's keen gaze. "A cold in my head always makes my eyes water, you know," she went on. "But don't trouble about me, Christina. Get on with your lessons, like a good girl."

"A cauld in the heid should mak' ye sneeze. Yer nose is a wee thing rid, but that's wi' greetin', auntie. I've been watchin' the tears comin' oot yer e'en an' playin' pap on the paper. What's the story aboot?"

"I have already told you to get on with your lessons, Christina," said Miss Purvis, with sundry sniffs.

"Hooch, ay! But are ye no' gaun to tell us what ye was greetin' aboot?"

"Certainly not. You are much too young to understand anything about the tragedies of life, my dear." Miss Purvis's voice became soft.



"Och, I've read dizzens o' thae wee stories," said Christina. "An' I've been gey near greetin' masel' whiles. Are ye jist at the second last chapter, auntie? Ay, that'll be whaur ye are."

"How do you know that?" Miss Purvis regarded with surprise her niece, who was seated too far away to have read the small type of the novelette.

"I jist guessed. The second last chapter's aye a bit sad," said Christina. "But it a' comes oot in the wash in the last chapter," she added cheerfully. "It's a peety ye canna keep mind o' that at the sad bits. Eh, auntie?"

Miss Purvis smiled slightly. "I'm afraid the stories would not be so interesting if we always remembered that," she said.

Christina did not speak for fully a minute. Her expression was thoughtful.

"Auntie!"

"Yes, dear?"

"I suppose ye like the love-stories the best?"

"Oh, well——" Miss Purvis hesitated. "Most of the stories I read now are what one might call love-stories. But I used to read other books a great deal—Carlyle, and Ruskin, and——"

"Was they murder stories?"

"Dear me, no! What an idea! They weren't stories at all. They were—well, some day you must read them, too, or perhaps I shall read them to you. They are very inspiring."

"Are they? I think I like love-stories the best, tae," said Christina. "My! it's fine when ye come to a rale lovey-dovey bit whaur the young man proposes——"

"Really, Christina! I cannot allow you to talk of such things——"

"But it's awfu' when the young leddy says she canna except him, because she's got to mairry anither man for his gold! There some unco bad folk in the stories whiles—oh, terrible bad folk, an' that crool! D'ye never feel ye wud like to knock the faces aff the bad yins, auntie?"

"I think I had better hear you repeat some of your lessons now," said Miss Purvis. "What about your history and geography?"

"Aw, there's nae hurry for them. D'ye no' feel ye wud like to knock——"

"That was a dreadful thing to say. Do not repeat it, Christina."

"But d'ye no' get angry at the bad yins, auntie?"

"Of course," Miss Purvis replied, rather firmly, "I am bound to feel indignant with those characters who are responsible for the sufferings of the good people in the story. But we should not allow the desire for cruel vengeance to animate our——"

"Och, I believe ye wud knock the stuffin' oot the bad yins, if ye got the chance, auntie!"

"Hush, Christina! You must not use such

language. Try to remember that it is unmaidenly, and that it hurts me."

"I'll try," said Christina agreeably. "I say, auntie, did ye ever see onybody proposin'?"

"No, indeed! Give me your geography."

Christina unwillingly handed over the slim volume, and a short silence ensued, during which the aunt found the place.

"Now, Christina, where is Liverpool situated, and for what is it noted?"

"We had that last week," said Christina. "Ye're at the wrang page. My! I wud like fine to see a proposal. Me an' Jessie Ann M'Kirdy followed Miss Carvey an' a young gentleman for three mile on Sunday efternune, awa' through the woods, thinkin' he was gaun to propose, but——"

"Christina!" Miss Purvis exclaimed in a horrified voice. "What a shocking thing to do!"

"But he didna propose."

"I mean that it was shocking of you to spy upon people. You must never do it again."

"But I bet Jessie Ann a farden's worth o' slim-jim he wud propose next Sunday. We've been keepin' an e'e on them for a while back. He's been comin' wi' the efternune boat every Seturday since the New Year, an' last Seturday he was that gled to see her that he fell ower a herrin'-boax on the pier an' smashed his guid bumberstick. An' then he tried to let on he was used to daein' that every day, an' then he gi'ed

the pierman a glove instead o' a penny, an' then——"

"That will do, Christina," said Miss Purvis severely. "I am shocked and grieved at your want of delicacy. But I may tell you that the young gentleman has been betrothed to Miss Carvey since Christmas."

"D'ye mean engaged?"

"I do."

"Weel, that's an' awfu' drap," said Christina sadly. "I suppose Jessie Ann'll ha'e to get the slim-jim."

"Are you in the habit of laying wagers with Jessie Ann M'Kirdy?" The voice of Miss Purvis was then nearer to being "awful" than it had ever been, to Christina's ears, at least.

"Layin' what?" the girl stammered.

"You spoke just now of a bet——"

"Oh, that's what ye mean." Christina hesitated.

"Answer me truthfully, Christina. Are you in the habit of betting with Jessie Ann?"

"Whiles," replied Christina, at last, with an effort. "But"—her face cleared a little—"I never lost till this time, auntie."

Miss Purvis shook her head in a helpless fashion.

"Child," she said solemnly, "don't you understand that it's wrong to bet, whether you win or lose?"

"I'll no' dae't again, auntie," said Christina in a whisper.

"You promise?"

"Uh-ha."

"And you will never seek to spy on people?"

"I—I'll no' dae't again. But, auntie—it—it wudna be wrang to see a proposal by—by accident—eh? Supposin' I couldna help seein'——"

"You would shut your eyes, if you could not turn your back. Now, wouldn't you, my dear?"

Christina's better nature won—with a struggle. "Uh-ha," she muttered.

Whereupon Miss Purvis came over and kissed her, and promised her a whole pennyworth of slim-jim to divide with her fellow-sinner.

"Maybe," said Christina reflectively, "I wudna like a real proposal as well as yin in a book. D'ye think it wud be as nice, auntie?"

"I'm sure I could not say, dear," her aunt replied, as she reseated herself and opened the geography book. "But now you must put all those ideas out of your head, Christina, and keep them out for years to come. When you want a story to read come to me for it. Don't just read anything you happen to find on the counter. You will have plenty of time for all that later. And now—where is Bristol?"

"On the map. I markit it wi' ma pincil. If ye turn back a page——"

"But whereabouts in England is it?"

"Aw, ask me anither!" said Christina.

It was not the geography lesson that kept Christina lying awake that night half-an-hour

longer than usual. Mr. Baldwin h :d called that day, and she had seen ˙ im during the dinner hour.

"He's an awfu' nice man," she thought in the silence and darkness, "an' I think he's saft on auntie. I wonder if she's saft on him. Oh, I wonder! But she wudna talk about love when I tried to get her to talk about it. My! It's peculiar!"

III

A ZEALOUS APPRENTICE

ON Friday nights Christina went to bed with her hair in a score of tight, thin pigtails, and on Saturday mornings she paid especial attention to her toilet generally; for on Saturdays Miss Purvis allowed her to stand behind the counter, and even to serve those customers who desired such simple wares as newspapers and pins. Miss Purvis hoped that her niece might thus learn something of the stationery and fancy-goods trade, while Christina, a few months after her first appearance in the shop, was privately of the opinion that she could have run the business a great deal better than her aunt.

Christina chafed in secret at not being permitted to attend to any customer, irrespective of his or her requirements. She felt that there were many occasions when Miss Purvis failed to effect a sale through sheer lack of *repartee*—though, of course, that word was not in Christina's vocabulary. But the word "gab" was, and the girl's inward remark was frequently to this effect—

"If she gi'ed them mair gab they wud buy mair."

But Miss Purvis was too genteel and dignified to chaff or persuade customers.

"I endeavour to stock the best of everything, and I can do no more," she said on one occasion, when a lady had refused to pay fourpence for a hair-net because she had seen them advertised somewhere or other at seven for a shilling.

"But ye should ha'e tell't her the chape yins was rotten rubbidge," said Christina.

"*Were*," Miss Purvis gently replied. "And the word *rotten* is not a nice one. Old wood might sometimes be correctly described as rotten——"

"An' whiles aiples an' plooms an' ither frit," Christina put in. "I yinst got a——"

"Hush!" Miss Purvis shuddered.

"Weel, ye should ha'e tell't the leddy the chape yins was——"

"The lady should have known that for herself."

"If I was you, auntie, I wud keep naethin' but chape rubbidge—an' sell it dear when I got the chance. Ay, wud I!"

"That will do, Christina. You know quite well that honesty is the best policy."

Christina smiled. "I suppose ye mean that cheatery 'll choke ye," she said.

"That will do, Christina."

"I dinna believe it. I've seen plenty cheatery, but I never seen it choke onybody," pursued Christina. "I never seen onybody chokit but a baby, an' it was a bit ham that done it, an' the

baby was ower wee—it wasna a year auld—for to cheat onybody."

Miss Purvis could not refrain from pointing out that tender infants did not get ham.

"They dae in Glesca. I've seen babies gettin' wulks *; ay, an'——"

Christina could not understand why at this point her aunt suddenly embraced her, and in a husky voice called her "a poor neglected child."

On a certain chilly Saturday forenoon in January aunt and niece were at their posts behind the counter. Miss Purvis sat beside the till, crocheting. Christina was adding to the lustre of the stock of hatpins; she breathed loudly on each massive "gem," and then polished it with a handful of tissue paper. She liked handling the hatpins better than anything in the shop. Their richness appealed to her. Once Miss Purvis had come in from Sunday evening service to behold her niece, who had a cold, strutting before the small mirror with every pin in the shop thrust through her plain straw hat.

But Christina's thoughts on this forenoon were not confined to the glittering vanities. She had done a good stroke of business earlier in the day, and she still brooded upon it with exquisite satisfaction. It was a secret which she would not have shared, even with her aunt.

Just as the morning boat was taking the pier

*Wulks=Whilks.

a gentleman—a stranger to Christina—had rushed into the shop, thrown down a penny, and gasped for a morning paper. The morning papers had been sold out, but Christina, with a bright smile, handed him a copy of the previous day's issue. Through the window she had watched him staggering down the pier with a heavy bag, and had felt proud and happy ever since.

"That's the wey to keep a shope," she told herself. "Maybe he didna get readin' yesterday's paper," she added, and felt quite virtuous.

There had been a long lull in the forenoon's business—not an unusual happening—but at last there were signs that a customer was at hand. The door-handle, which was rather loose, rattled warningly and a face was pressed against the semi-opaque glass. Then the door opened a couple of inches and remained in that position. A sound of whispering reached the ears of Miss Purvis and Christina, both of whom were now standing at attention.

At the end of a minute the door closed, and a coin was heard to drop on the doorstep. The ring of metal was followed by a shuffling of feet. Then a silence, during which two faces were pressed against the glass.

Once more the door was opened, this time sufficiently wide to admit a little boy, of four years of age, whose fat countenance was exceeding solemn. The little boy was followed by his sister, a little girl, of seven or so, whose expres-

sion was no less serious. Very gravely they advanced towards the counter. Christina knew them quite well, but pretended she had never seen them before.

The little girl, fixing a cold eye on Miss Purvis and jerking her head sideways in the direction of the little boy, said—

"He's wantin' to buy something."

"And what does he want to buy, my dear?" Miss Purvis asked pleasantly.

"He doesna' ken," said the little girl.

"Ay, I ken!" said the little boy in a voice hoarse with excitement or indignation—perhaps both.

"Weel, what dae ye want to buy?"

"A penny thing."

Miss Purvis turned to the little boy. "Is it a toy you wish to buy?" she inquired kindly.

The little boy gaped, and his sister replied—

"He wudna tell me, but I suppose it's a toy. It's a toy ye're wantin', Jimsie?"

Jimsie shook his head violently.

"Come on, noo, Jimsie, tell us what ye're wantin' to buy," his sister said persuasively. "Come on, tell us!"

"A scooter," said the boy in a low voice.

"But ye canna get a scooter. Maw said ye wasna to get a scooter, an' ye promised ye wudna ask for yin."

"But I want yin."

The little girl turned from him impatiently.

"Ha'e ye ony scooters?" she demanded, with a warning wink at Miss Purvis.

Miss Purvis looked blank.

"She means things for sookin' in watter an' scootin' it oot again," put in Christina; adding, "we dinna keep them."

"No; I don't keep them, my dear," said Miss Purvis.

"There, ye see, Jimsie!" the little girl cried triumphantly. "She doesna keep scooters, so ye canna get yin."

Whereupon Jimsie sobbed freely till the penny slipped from his clutch, and he forgot his grief in searching for it.

"Christina," said Miss Purvis, "bring forward some toys. Perhaps James will see something he fancies."

"I canna see onything," complained Jimsie, whose nose was touching the edge of the counter.

Promptly his sister seized him in her arms, and bundled him upon a chair standing against the counter, on which Christina had just laid a small tin boat on wheels and a monkey on a stick.

"Bring a *lot* of toys," whispered Miss Purvis.

"If I bring a lot, he'll no' ken what to choose," muttered her niece.

"Do as I tell you, Christina!"

"Hooch, ay!" said Christina resignedly, and brought a dozen different articles.

Jimsie began to play with the monkey on the

stick. Christina watched the monkey going up and down till she could bear it no longer.

"Are ye gaun to buy it, Jimsie?" she asked sharply.

"Hush, Christina!" said her aunt.

"It's nane o' your business, Teeny," said the little girl, putting out her tongue.

Christina ignored her. "If ye spile the works, ye'll ha'e to buy it!" she said to the little boy.

"Hush, Christina!"

The little boy laid down the monkey, and Christina snatched it from the counter.

"He'll maybe buy it yet," said Jimsie's sister. "He aye tak's a whiley to mak' up his mind. See, Jimsie! Here an' awfu' nice wee boat——"

"It winna sail," the boy objected.

"But it'll hurl.* Wud ye no' like a watch an' chain? Eh? Weel, here a wee motor-caur. Is that no' nate, Jimsie? I'm shair ye wud like it fine. Ye wud like the trumpet? Blaw it, Jimsie. It's fine an' lood."

Jimsie blew it till he was breathless.

"If he blaws it again, he'll ha'e to buy it," said Christina in a loud whisper.

"Hush, Christina!"

After further consideration, Jimsie decided against the trumpet. Christina removed it from the counter and scrutinized it to see if he had bitten the mouth-piece.

"Weel, Jimsie," the little girl inquired, "if ye're no' for the trumpet, what are ye for?"

* *Hurl*=ride (vehicle).

"I dinna ken," replied Jimsie, as he picked up a toy in each hand.

"I tell't ye, auntie!" Christina muttered. "He canna chose his pick wi' sae mony things."

"Hush, Christina!"

"Oh, hush-a-baw-baby!" said Christina crossly.

At the end of twenty minutes the little boy slid from his chair, and, drawing down his sister's shoulder, whispered earnestly in her ear.

"Ye should ha'e said that afore," said his sister, without, however, any displeasure. In fact, she smiled a little smile of satisfaction.

She turned to Miss Purvis and calmly said—

"He wants to buy sweeties wi' his penny."

Then, taking hands, the twain moved to the door.

A moment later Christina had whipped round the counter, and was at the door ere they could close it. The children fled.

"Christina, where are you going?"

Without answering, Christina ran out.

In a few minutes she reappeared, smiling cheerfully, and gently pushing the children before her.

"He's gaun to buy the monkey," she announced to her aunt. At the same time she took the monkey from the far-end of the counter, where she had left it, and handed it to Jimsie, receiving his penny in exchange.

She then guided the silent children, who had rather a dazed look, to the door, and saw them safely outside.

"Christina," said Miss Purvis, on recovering from her amazement, "what did you say to those children?"

"Never heed," returned Christina, spinning the warm penny on the counter.

"You must tell me."

"Oh, weel, I jist tell't them I wud gi'e them the nick——"

"The what?"

"The polis—ye ken awfu' little, auntie."

"The police!" Miss Purvis exclaimed, ignoring the depreciatory remark. "What for?"

"For pretendin' they was gaun to buy, an' no' buyin'. So they was feart, an' cam' back an' bocht the monkey. There ye are! That's the second penny—that's a penny I've saved ye the day. What's ado?"

"Oh, Christina, Christina! I'm vexed with you!"

"Hoo that?"

Miss Purvis drew herself up. She pointed to the penny on the counter.

"That's your Saturday penny, Christina——"

"Thenk ye, auntie."

"You will run after the children at once, give them that penny, and tell them to buy sweets with it—from yourself."

"No' likely!"

"Then I must do so myself," said Miss Purvis.

There was a silence.

"Aweel," said the girl slowly. "I'll gang." She went round to the door. "What'll I dae if he's broke the monkey?"

"You have nothing to do with the monkey. I expect you'll find the little boy crying because of your cruelty."

Christina's expression softened. "I didna mean for to be crool," she said. "I—I'll gi'e him ma penny."

She went out, and closed the door behind her. Then she opened it a few inches.

"A' the same," she said, more in sorrow than in anger, "ye dinna ken hoo to keep a shope, auntie."

IV.

IN FULL CHARGE

WHEN the doctor had gone Miss Purvis, who was lying on the shabby old sofa in the living-room, turned to her niece, and, with a groan of despair, said—

"This is a dreadful predicament, Christina. I'm sure I don't know what is to be done. It will be three days at least before I can stand."

"Och, never you heed, auntie," said Christina kindly and reassuringly. "I'll luk efter ye."

"Yes, dear; but who's to look after the shop?"

"I'll manage that fine," said Christina promptly, unable to repress a snigger of satisfaction.

Miss Purvis did not know what to say; she shrank from hurting the girl's feelings. So she groaned again.

"Is yer fit hurtin' ye, auntie?"

"Not now. The doctor has made it much easier with the bandages. But nothing could have been more unfortunate than a sprained ankle."

"It wud ha'e been mair unfortunate if ye had broke yer neck. I've been expectin' ye to

hurt yersel' for a while back." Christina spoke almost severely. "Ye're no' soople enough for sclimin' ladders. Ye should let me dae that. But it was a guid thing ye fell afore ye got the haud o' the gum bottles. A dizzen o' gum wud ha'e made an awfu' mess——"

"And I might have been severely wounded," said Miss Purvis.

"So ye might. I never thocht o' that. 'Deed, ye've a heap to be thankfu' for—ha'e ye no'?"

Miss Purvis smiled in spite of her mental and physical discomfort. "You're an extraordinary girl, Christina!"

"Hoo that?"

"I think," said her aunt, evading the question, "I think you may shut the front door now. It was certainly fortunate that my accident occurred when business was over for the day. When you have shut the door, bring me the account-file and the cash-box. Mr. Baldwin will be calling to-morrow, and I must have his money ready for you to pay to him."

"Could Baldyin no' come ben an' see ye here, auntie?"

"Certainly not!" cried Miss Purvis, flushing.

"What wey that?"

"Oh, you don't understand, Christina. It would be most improper. And—er—his name is Mr. Bald*win*."

"Ay, I ken. But I canna help ca'in' him

Baldyin, for he *is* a bald yin." Christina laughed heartily.

"That will do, Christina," said her aunt reprovingly. "Go at once and shut the door. Then I shall instruct you regarding to-morrow. I do hope you will be careful and discreet."

"Hooch, ay!" Christina replied, and left Miss Purvis full of forebodings, which forebodings did not decrease during the watches of the night.

Christina was up betimes. First she ran down to the pier to receive the parcel of morning papers from the early boat. Then she delivered copies at certain houses. Then she returned to the shop, which she had locked up behind her, opened it, and arranged the remaining papers on the counter. Then she made breakfast, after which she assisted her aunt to dress.

"Well, dear," Miss Purvis gratefully remarked, "if you end the day as well as you have begun it, I'm sure I'll be very proud of you."

"Oh, dinna fash yersel', auntie. I'll no' gi'e onything awa' for naethin'."

"But I trust you will be circumspect and discreet. Some customers, you know, are very easily offended; all customers must be treated respectfully. You promise to be careful?"

Christina nodded her head vigorously.

"And try to speak nicely," continued Miss

Purvis. "Now here is Mr. Baldwin's account and the money to pay it——"

"Ony discoont?"

"No; Mr. Baldwin's firm does not allow discount."

"We'll ha'e to see about that!"

"Christina! You promised to be discreet."

"A' richt," said Christina, not satisfied, however.

"And here," went on Miss Purvis, "is a list of goods to be ordered from Mr. Baldwin. You may read it over."

The girl read it over, frowning.

"If I was you," she said at last, "I wudna get ony mair o' thae penny whustles. They're no' in the noo. An' cheeny dolls is oot, tae. An' ye've forgot to pit doon peevers,* an'——"

"I haven't sold a peever for years," Miss Purvis interrupted.

"Ye canna expect to sell onything if ye dinna keep it. Get a dizzen o' peevers, an' I'll shin † get the lassies to buy them. I'm a dab at the peever, and I'll set the fashion. But I wudna get ony mair cheeny dolls nor——"

Miss Purvis snatched away the list, and cried irritably, "If you can't promise to do exactly as you are told, Christina, I shan't allow you behind the counter again. I'll simply shut the shop until I am better."

"Ye canna shut the shope frae whaur ye are," Christina calmly returned, "unless ye hap' a'

* *Peever*=Implement used in hop-scotch. † *Shin*=soon.

the road to the door on the yin fit—an' I'll no' let ye, auntie. A' the same, ye should order the peevers."

"Very well," said the spinster, somewhat mollified. "You may order a dozen."

Christina beamed her satisfaction.

Up till eleven o'clock Christina's only customers were for newspapers. To several of them she endeavoured to sell other things, but without success.

Then a woman came in to get some wool matched.

"Hoo's yer auntie, the day? I heard she had gotten a fa'."

"Ay; she's gey bad, but it micht ha'e been waur if she had got the haud o' the gum."

"The what?"

Christina explained, after which they came to business. The girl turned out all the wool she could find.

"Ah, ye canna match it," said the woman at last, in disgust.

"But this yin's awfu' near it," pleaded Christina.

"Near it? Ye're blin', lassie!" 'And the customer departed.

"Christina!" called Miss Purvis.

Christina attended the summons, looking cross.

"Who was in just now?" inquired Miss Purvis.

"Mistress M'Cabe. She wantit some worstit matched, but hers was ower ugly."

"I hope you didn't tell her that, Christina?" Miss Purvis looked anxious.

"I wisht I had!" The girl went back to the shop, banging the door behind her.

"Christina!"

Christina retraced her steps.

"What's up?"

"You must leave the door open, so that I can hear what is going on."

Christina, very grudgingly, left the door open a few inches, and hurried behind the counter.

The Rev. Mr. Beaton had just entered the shop.

He had started to inquire, in his usual genial tones, for the invalid, when Christina, holding up a warning finger, whispered, "*Sh!*" and glanced meaningly at the door of the living-room.

"Ah!" said the minister, lowering his voice. "Having a rest. Well, you must tell her I called to inquire for her. I'll call again later on."

"Naethin' else the day, sir?"

"Oh yes, by the bye, I want some sealing-wax."

Highly delighted, Christina procured a stick and laid it on the counter. "Onything else, sir? Pens, ink, blottin'-paper, sermon-paper, envelopes——" She tried to think of other arti-

cles in keeping with a minister. "*Christian Weekly*——"

"Nothing else, thank you," said Mr. Beaton, smiling and laying down a sixpence.

Christina wrapped up the wax and handed it to him, with threepence of change.

"Sealing-wax gone up in price?" he asked, looking at the coppers. "Miss Purvis used to charge me just twopence."

Only for a moment was she disconcerted.

"Thruppence is the price," she solemnly whispered. "It wud be a deid loss at tuppence, sir. But I've catched her afore gi'ein' things chape to folk she thocht a lot o'."

The minister beat a hasty retreat. He was afraid his laugh might waken the invalid.

"Christina!"

"Hullo?"

"Who was that?"

"The meenister, speirin' for ye. He's comin' back again. Whisht! I see Baldyin comin' aff the boat. . . . He's comin' aff the pier noo! . . . Noo he's speakin' to the piermaster. He's lukin' at the shope. I think the piermaster's tellin' him aboot ye fa'in' aff the ladder. He's lukin' vexed. . . . Here he comes!"

But Mr. Baldwin did not come to the shop just then. After halting and gazing reflectively at the ground for nearly a minute, he turned to the left and went off in that direction.

"Here, auntie, Baldyin's no' comin' efter a'!

He's awa' the Kinlochan road. Wull I rin oot an' cry on him to come back?"

"Certainly not, Christina!"

"But what aboot the peevers? I think I better scoot efter him. Eh?"

"Come here, Christina!" her aunt called sternly.

The girl obeyed slowly. "I doot ye've lost him noo," she said, eyeing Miss Purvis with reproach. "What wey did ye no' let me scoot efter him?"

"Because it would be impertinent and foolish. Mr. Baldwin knows his business. He will doubtless return here when he finds it convenient."

"If he doesna come back, wull ye write for the peevers, auntie?"

"Can you think of othing but peevers?" Miss Purvis cried quite crossly.

Christina regarded her aunt inquiringly for several seconds. Then she smiled, and put the kettle on to boil.

V.

"WITH BALDYIN'S REGAIRDS"

CHRISTINA had just set a cup of tea and a slice of hot buttered toast within easy reach of her aunt, when she heard the shop-door open.

Peeping through the curtain she saw a pleasant-featured gentleman, tall, clean-shaven, and rosy, approaching the counter.

"Baldyin," she whispered to her aunt. Then, opening the glazed door a few inches, she called, in her most business-like voice—

"Tak' a sate, please. I'll see ye in twa shakes!"

"Oh, Christina," murmured the helpless Miss Purvis, "do try to speak with more refinement."

"Oh, Jamaica!" said Christina, rushing to the sink and turning on the water. "Ma fingers is a' creesh."

Miss Purvis shuddered. "Christina," she began in a low, pleading voice, "you will remember to be discreet, won't you? Mr. Baldwin is a gentleman——"

"He is that," said Christina cordially. "He gi'ed me a saxpence when he was here afore the New Year, ye mind."

"Yes. But he is more than kind; he is very

refined. Try not to be rude or impertinent. I should not like him to be offended in my shop."

"Oh, dinna fash yersel', auntie," said the girl, hurriedly drying her hands. "Him an' me'll get on fine——"

"*He and I*, Christina. I wonder if you will ever learn your grammar."

"Maybe I wull—when I'm as auld as you, auntie. Noo, jist you tak' yer tea and toast, an' dinna get into a stew. If the doctor comes when I'm engaged at the coonter, I'll jist send him in to ye." Christina turned to the door.

"Christina!"

"I hear ye."

"Leave the door open."

"Ye'll get cauld in yer fit. There's an awfu' draught the day."

"My foot is well covered."

Weel, ye'll get it in yer heid."

as I tell you, Christina."

och, ay! Onything for peace!" Christina departed, leaving the door open a couple of inches.

Miss Purvis strained her ears, but heard very little of the conversation at the counter, for Christina, on emerging from the living-room, had repeated the signal which she had found effective in the case of the Rev. Mr. Beaton.

"She's to be kep' quate," she said softly across the counter.

"I was exceedingly sorry to hear, from the

piermaster, of the accident," returned Mr. Baldwin, also softly.

"Ay, I seen ye. Awfu' cauld weather—eh? Hoo's tred wi' ye?" she went on pleasantly. "Uh-ha! I daursay ye'll be a bit slack efter the Christmas rush. Weel, I was to pay ye yer account. Here it is. Three pound seventeen an' nine."

"Thank you," said Mr. Baldwin, repressing a smile.

Christina laid the account before him, dipped a pen deep in the inkpot, and handed it to him. Having inked her fingers, she pretended to be looking for something on the floor while she wiped them on her stocking.

Then she laid on the counter three soiled notes, a half-sovereign, and two half-crowns.

"What's the discoont?" she inquired in a careless tone of voice.

"I'm afraid there isn't any discount," he replied, smiling.

"That's peculiar," said Christina, using a word to which she had recently taken a violent fancy.

"Oh, no, it's quite usual," returned the amused traveller. "Miss Purvis never expects discount."

"It wud gi'e her a nice surprise." She added a shilling to the money already on the counter. "There, noo! That'll leave a shillin' an' ninepence for discoont. Eh?"

Mr. Baldwin shook his shiny head. "I'm

afraid I can't afford that," he said, as he affixed a stamp to the account.

Unwillingly Christina produced another shilling. "The ninepence 'll no' kill ye," she remarked, with a bright, encouraging smile.

He hesitated. "Well," he said at last, "I'll let it go this time, but please do not ask for it again. You see, we sell our goods so cheaply that we really can't afford to allow any deductions." He receipted the account and handed it to her.

"Much obleeged to ye," she said politely. "Noo, I've got an order for ye, Maister Baldwin."

"That's good! I didn't think Miss Purvis would have been able to attend to anything."

"Aweel, ye see, she had *me*. I ken a guid bit aboot the business."

"So I have learned," said Mr. Baldwin, stroking his chin.

"But I'll ha'e a squint at yer samples first, if ye please. Oh, jist haud on a meenute. Here's the doctor comin'."

The doctor entered the shop, and Christina gave him a friendly nod. "Jist gang furrit," * she said.

He disappeared into the back-room, and, to the girl's satisfaction, shut the door behind him.

She turned once more to Mr. Baldwin, who was obligingly unstrapping a square leather case.

* *Furrit*=forward.

"Ha'e ye ony peevers wi' ye?" she asked.

"Not with me. But, of course, we can supply them."

"Could ye manage a dizzen?"

"We would do our best."

"White marble yins?"

"Yes. Penny peevers, you mean?"

"Uh-ha. What's the price a dizzen?"

"Eightpence."

"My! that's peculiar!"

"Best we can do, ma'am," said Mr. Baldwin quite gravely.

"Weel, I'll risk a dizzen. See an' send the best." Christina referred to her list. "Ha'e ye a sample o' jumpin'-jakes?"

"Jumping-jacks? I believe I have. . . . Yes, here we are!"

"Work it, please."

Mr. Baldwin worked it, while Christina regarded the operation with a critical eye. Then she held out her hand for it, and examined it minutely.

"Could ye send three o' thur?"

"Certainly. We can make you up a dozen of assorted toys, including the jumping-jacks. But could you not do with six?"

Christina shook her head. "There's jist the three new babies in Kilmabeg the noo. Auntie was for orderin' hauf-a-dizzen, but I chekit her. Weel, what else ha'e ye got?"

Mr. Baldwin laid an array of toys and fancy

goods on the counter. Christina again referred to her list.

"Ye've nae burls * there," she said, looking up. "I was wantin' hauf-a-dozen, but they wud need to be better nor the last lot. The last lot o' burls wasna up to the mark."

"Indeed, I'm sorry to hear that. What was like the matter?"

"The pea was aye stickin'. We had a heap o' complaints."

"I'll see what can be done."

"An' ye can send three penny motor-caurs. They're fashionable the noo. That'll mak' the dizzen."

"Thank you. Any dolls?"

"Dolls! Na, na. We're chock-a-block wi' dolls the noo. The cheeny yins ha'e been a failure. But we can dae wi' a dizzen cahootchy ba's. See an' send guid yins that'll stot † weel."

"This size?" inquired Mr. Baldwin.

"Ay, that size, but no' that sort. It's plain yins I want. The pentit yins is ower dear, excep' when the gentry's here in the simmer. What dae ye ca' this?" She held up one of the samples.

"Oh, that's one of the latest novelties. It is a bust of the Prime Minister and pin-cushion combined. To be retailed at threepence each."

"Och, that's nae use—faur ower dear! An' it's no like a meenister, onywey."

* *Burl*=whistle. † *Stot*=bounce.

"Well, what do you think of this for a cheap line in purses? Twopence each, retail."

Christina shook her head. "If that purse was gettin' damp, the cash wud fa' through it."

The traveller laughed good-humouredly. "Well, what about hatpins?"

"Uh-ha! We're needing hatpins." She consulted the list, on which was marked—"One dozen assorted hatpins."

"Ye can send twa dizzen assortit," she said briskly. "Them wi' the big green jools——"

"Emeralds?"

"Aw; it's nae odds as lang as they're green." Christina then proceeded to read, with many comments, the remaining items on her list. She would have liked very much to have made additional purchases from the samples which Mr. Baldwin continued to produce from the large case, but the thought of Miss Purvis restrained her. "I'll get auntie to buy them hersel' the next time," she reflected.

"Is there anything else now, Miss Christina?" the traveller asked, after he had noted the orders.

"That's the lot," she replied regretfully. "Mind an' send the best," she added. "Dinna send the burls wi' saft peas in them."

"I've made a special note about the whistles and peas," said Mr. Baldwin. He set to work to pack his samples.

The girl watched him. Presently she remarked—

"Yer weans * 'll ha'e fine fun wi' yer samples whiles."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I was sayin' yer weans 'll ha'e fine fun wi' yer samples. I suppose they get playin' wi' them when ye're in the hoose. What d'ye dae when the weans breaks a sample, Maister Baldwin?"

"My dear girl," said the traveller, laughing, "you have a wonderful imagination. But I happen to be a bachelor."

Christina whistled. "That's peculiar," she said. "But I s'pose it's cheaper."

At this point the doctor reappeared. "I'll be back shortly," he said to Christina.

"Is she no' gettin' better?"

"Oh, yes. She's getting on nicely. How are *you* getting on?" he inquired quizzingly.

"Champion!"

The doctor hurried away.

Christina turned to Mr. Baldwin. "Him an' me's rale pack," † she observed, nodding in the direction of the doctor, who was passing the window. "I yinst helpit his wife for a week when the servant was lyin' badly. He used to let me wash his bottles, an' yinst I heard him pullin' a man's tooth. My! thon's an' excitin' hoose to bide in! I mind——"

Mr. Baldwin had finished his packing.

"I'm afraid I must go, Miss Christina. The steamer is about due, I think," he said.

* *Wean*=child. † *Pack*=Friendly.

"Thank you very much for attending to me. I hope your aunt will soon be well. She is fortunate in having so capable an assistant." And he bowed.

Christina's countenance beamed with delight.

"I'm maybe no' sae green as I'm cabbage-lookin'," she murmured modestly.

Mr. Baldwin laughed and held out his hand, which the girl shook warmly.

Then the traveller lifted from the floor an unsymmetrical newspaper-covered parcel, which Christina had not hitherto observed. He laid it before her.

"This is a fowl—a chicken," he said, a little awkwardly. "The people at the farm along the road assured me it was a nice one. Would you mind handing it to Miss Purvis—with my compliments and best wishes for a speedy recovery? Good-bye." He grasped his sample case, put on his hat, and made for the door.

"Hey!" cried Christina, as he was disappearing. "Here a meenute!"

With the door-handle in his fingers the traveller looked round.

Christina was holding out a sixpence and three pennies.

"Ye're awfu' kind," she said. "I'll let ye aff the ninepence discoont."

But Mr. Baldwin, with a hurried, "No, no, my dear child!" closed the door and fled towards the pier.

"Christina!"

"I'm comin', auntie."

A moment later she entered the living-room. She was trying to remember Mr. Baldwin's message to her aunt, but its exact words proved too much for her.

"Here's a poultry, wi' Baldwin's love," she announced.

"What?" shrieked Miss Purvis, crimson.

"Weel, it's a hen, wi' his kind regairds," said Christina, removing the newspaper.

Tears came into the eyes of the spinster.

"How kind!" she sighed. "I hope you thanked him nicely, my dear," she added.

"Hooch, ay!"

"But every one is so kind. Fancy what the doctor is doing for me?" Miss Purvis went on. "He has gone to borrow an invalid-chair on wheels from a friend, so that I'll be able to get back to the shop at once! And you'll get back to school to-morrow morning. I expect him every minute now. Isn't he kind?"

Language failed Christina. Turning her back on her aunt, she dropped the fowl upon the floor and gave it a savage kick.

VI

A DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT

THE serving-maid at the doctor's house was again laid up, and Christina, almost feverish with importance, was assisting the doctor's wife. In vain Miss Purvis had protested against the girl's donning her Sunday clothes; Christina had retorted that she must be dressed in her best, lest she should be called upon to open the door and show people into the consulting-room, which, by the way, she called "the wee room wi' the queer smell an' the tooth-pullers."

During the early part of the day she was occupied with the dirtier work of the house, which she performed in an overall kindly supplied by her temporary mistress. But that work done, the overall was laid aside, and Christina admired herself in a muslin apron belonging to the invalid maid. The maid being tall of stature and Christina rather short, the apron reached considerably beyond the hem of the girl's skirt; but Christina did not mind that, and only wished she had a cap to complete her costume. While alone in the kitchen she wore on her head a paper bag, which had once held sugar biscuits, manipulated as nearly as

possible into the semblance of a housemaid's cap, with strips of white paper, removed from a pound of bacon, for strings.

"My! it's awfu' tasty!" she remarked to herself, eyeing the small looking-glass near the sink. She did not, however, refer to the flavour of the bacon. It was later that she realized how much sugar had got into her thick fair hair.

Nothing of an exciting nature happened during the forenoon. Immediately after lunch the doctor went out to pay some professional visits, and Christina had just finished washing the dishes when her temporary mistress came into the kitchen dressed for out-of-doors. Christina hastily removed her improvised head-gear.

"Well, Christina," the lady said pleasantly, "do you think you could keep the house from running away till I return? I have a call to make on a lady who is leaving Kilmabeg to-morrow, otherwise I would not leave you alone."

Christina mentally blessed the lady who was on the eve of quitting Kilmabeg. She had never hoped for such responsibility as this!

"Oh, I'll manage fine, mem," she replied eagerly.

"Jane is asleep at present," the lady went on, "but, if she calls, you will attend to her. She should get her medicine at half-past two, but only if she is awake."

Christina mentally decided that Jane would be awake at 2.30 sharp.

"I don't think I shall be away longer than an hour, Christina. If any one calls for the doctor, you know what to do? Write the name and message on the slate, and say you will tell the doctor immediately he comes home. I expect he will be back within an hour. Now, take care of yourself and the house, like a good girl." And with a cheerful nod the doctor's wife departed.

"Oh, Jamaica!" murmured Christina in an ecstasy of delight at being left alone. She resumed her cap, held out her apron by the edges, and waltzed round the kitchen table. Halting at last, she looked at the clock, the hands of which were at ten minutes past two.

"I wish it was time for Jane to get her meddicine! Oh, I hope a customer 'll come soon! I best see if the sclate's clean."

She went into the hall and examined the white tablet, at the top of which was printed in gold the word "Engagements."

"I'll engage them!" she said to herself, giving the tablet an unnecessary rub. "Oh, I wish a customer would come!" she sighed. "A broken leg wud be fine!"

She strolled nto the consulting-room and sniffed the iodoform. She sank into an easy-chair, remarking, "This is whaur he pulls the teeth."

Christina had a sense of honour that re-

strained her from opening any of the presses or little drawers, and presently she returned to the kitchen where she removed her cap, reflecting that it would hardly do for a "customer" to see her in it.

The clock now indicated 2.20.

"Och, I'll jist wauken her," thought Christina. "I'll dae it by accident." And she pushed a large tray off the dresser.

A groan came from the little room adjoining the kitchen; then an exclamation of "Oh, mercy, lassie! What ha'e ye broke?"

"Naethin'," returned Christina reassuringly, as she entered the little room. "I'm sorry I waukened ye, but ye'll be ready for yer meddicine noo, Jane."

"Oh, feech! the nesty stuff!" cried Jane. "I dinna want it. Did the mistress say I was to get it? Eh? Aweel, Teeny, my lass, if ye pour it doon the jawbox,* I'll gi'e ye a penny. There noo!"

"Na, na, Jane!"—Christina's tone was stern—"I promised the mistress ye wud get it, an' yer gaun to get it! Hoo m' 'd'ye get?" she asked, picking up a bottle and spoon from the dressing-table.

"Oh, jist a wee, wee drap, Teeny," pleaded the hapless Jane. "Jist a teaspunfu' in plenty o' watter. It's got an awfu' bad taste. Oh, dear me, I'll never tak' service wi' a doctor again! He's faur ower free wi' his doses. Aw, jist a wee teaspunfu', Teeny."

* *Jawbox*=sink.

Christina, in a firm voice, read aloud from the label: "A tablespunefu' in watter thrice a day efter meals."

"Oh, me! But I—I ha'ena had a meal," moaned Jane, clutching at a straw.

"Ye had yer breakfast. I gi'ed it masel'." And Christina, having measured out a brimming tablespoonful of the physic, poured it into a tumbler.

"I—I'll gi'e ye tippence!" cried Jane.

Christina added water to the medicine. "Ha'e!" she said briefly. "Snap it up! It'll dae ye guid."

"Leave it wi' me, an' I'll tak' it, Teeny."

"I believe ye!" said the girl, without moving.

Jane took the tumbler, looked at Christina in frantic appeal, and repeated her offer of twopence.

Christina shook her head. "Snap it up!" she said once more. "Shift it!" she added, remembering a Glasgow expression.

Abandoning hope, Jane gulped the dose, blindly handed the tumbler to the girl, and disappeared beneath the bedclothes, groaning fearsomely.

"That's the style!" remarked Christina, and retired glowing with a sense of duty done. In a minute, however, she was back at the bedside with a heaped spoonful of sugar.

She had scarcely returned to the kitchen when the bell rang. She rushed to the glass,

inspected her face, pushed back her hair; then walked sedately to the front door. On opening it she met with a disappointment. A message-boy held out a parcel, grinned, and said familiarly—

"Hullo, Teeny! Ye've got on yer daidley * the day!"

"Impiddence!" muttered Christina, grabbing the parcel and banging the door. She walked back to the kitchen with her rather pretty nose in the air. "I'll gi'e Geordie M'Cubbin something for that, some day!" she said to herself.

She slammed the parcel on the table, and realized that it contained eggs.

Just then the bell rang again. She looked at the parcel, wondered how many were broken, felt like weeping, swallowed a lump, and—answered the bell. If it were only a broken leg! That, she reflected, would be worth several broken eggs, anyway.

She opened the door. A serving-maid, a stranger to Christina, stood on the step—a big bony creature, with a somewhat wild look.

"A customer!" thought Christina. "A tooth!"

"Mistress MacTougal's compliments, and she would pe opliged ef the toctor would pe pleased to come to see her to-day, thank you fery much."

Having emitted this declaration, the maid panted.

* *Daidley*=pinafore.

"Hielan'?" said Christina. "Tobermory?"

"Styornoway!" cried the maid. "Put I know Topermory. Wass you efer in Styornoway?"

"Na. But I was yinst at Gourock. D'ye want to see the doctor yersel'? because he's no' in," said Christina. Then she remembered the slate, and, turning, secured it.

Leaning negligently against the side of the doorway, she crossed one leg over the other, and said in a business-like voice—

"What did ye say was the name o' the pairty?" The maid looked bewildered.

"Wha sent ye?" Christina demanded.

"Mistress MacTougal!—I haf forgot the name of the house. I will haf come to this place last night."

"Mistress MacDougall—Och, I ken about her. Seaview's her hoose. Mind that, so as ye'll no' get lost. Is't her inside again?" Mrs. MacDougall had a local reputation for dyspepsia.

"I—I could not saay," said the Stornoway girl. "I think she wass saaying it will pe her asthma. Yess—I think it will pe her asthma. Thank you fery much."

"Haud on a shake!" said Christina. "That's peculiar! It sounds like an awfu' disease."

On the tablet she wrote large—

Mrs. MacDougal. Seavue. Hurassma.

Then, with her best business smile, she turned to the maid.

"Onything else the day, miss?" she sweetly inquired.

Again the other looked bewildered.

"Tits!" said Christina. "I forgot I wasna in the shope." Somehow she felt sorry for the maid. "Wud ye like to tak' a walk wi' me some nicht?" she asked abruptly, but kindly.

"Inteed, inteed I would," cried the Stornoway girl gratefully. "I wass all alone. I will pe knowing nopody in this place."

Whereupon Christina made an appointment.

During the interview she had forgotten about the eggs, but on her return to the kitchen misery claimed her for its own. The paper bag had given way, and a horrid pool was forming on the table around it.

"Oh, what a muck!" she sighed in despair, and proceeded to ascertain the extent of the damage. Out of the dozen, five eggs had escaped uninjured, five had been cracked or chipped, and two were hopelessly smashed.

Christina turned from the sorry sight, and leaning against the dresser, buried her face in her hands. She had remained thus for five minutes when she heard the invalid maid calling.

"Teeny! Here!"

Christina dried her eyes, sniffed, pulled herself together, and went to the door of the maid's

room. Halting outside, she inquired whether Jane wanted anything.

"Am I never to get onything to eat?" Jane cried querulously.

"Are ye hungry, Jane?"

"*Hungry?* Did the mistress no' leave word what I was to get?"

"She didna say. Maybe she forgot. Ye was sleepin', ye ken. Wull I get ye a piece, Jane?"

"A *piece?* An' the doctor said I was to be fed up and nourished! Is there nae soup in the larder?"

"I'll gang an' see," said Christina.

And then—oh, happy thought!

"Could ye no tak' an egg—twa eggs, Jane?"

"Could I no'!" the other exclaimed. "Twa eggs, poached, 'll dae fine. An' a cup o' tea! Haste ye, Teeny!"

Christina hesitated. "I—canna poach eggs," she stammered. "But I—I can scramble them."

"Dae onything ye like, lassie, but dae it quick," cried the famished one.

Christina skipped gaily back to the kitchen.

"Is the doctor in?"

An elderly gentleman put the question, not long after Christina had finished her cooking.

"He's no' in the noo," she replied, getting the tablet and her feet into position. "What's the name, please?"

"Mr. Reid, Burnside Cottage."

"D'ye spell yer name the common way or the ither way?"

"The other way," said the elderly gentleman, amused.

"Noo ye're chaffin'!" said Christina good-humouredly. "But it's nae odds to me hoo ye spell it." And she wrote down *Mr. Read.*

"An' what's the disease, if ye please, sir?" she inquired more respectfully.

"My good girl, are you the doctor's assistant?"

"Whiles," said Christina, thinking of the bottles she had washed. "But maybe," she went on, with a keen glance at the elderly gentleman, "maybe ye're no' a customer."

The man smiled. "Oh yes, I'm a customer," he said. "I called to see if the doctor would oblige me with a porous plaster, so you——"

"That's peculiar!" she remarked. "I yinst had a porous plester when I was bad wi' ma kist.* Is't yer kist that's hurtin' ye, sir?" The inquiry was sympathetic. "Awfu' sticky thing a porous plester! Jist wait and I'll write it doon."

She began to write, halted suddenly, and looked up at him.

"Eh—wud ye no' tak' a dizzen when ye're at it?"

"A dozen!"

"Ay; I daursay the doctor wud gi'e ye discoont, if ye was takin' a dizzen. Weel,

* *Kist*=chest.

mak' it hauf-a-dizzen, sir. Awfu' usefu' things to ha'e aboot the hoose."

Here the elderly gentleman gave way to laughter.

Christina felt hurt, and looked it.

"There's no' muckle wrang wi' *you,* I'm thinkin'!" she muttered crossly.

At this juncture the doctor appeared on the scene. Christina suddenly felt afraid.

But Mr. Reid turned to the doctor and said, by no means unkindly, "This young woman is better than any of your tonics, doctor."

He then nodded in friendly fashion to the girl, who, covered with proud blushes, fled to the kitchen, and there waltzed round the table until she was giddy.

VII

THE GRAMMAR LESSON

"I PRESUME," said Miss Purvis, slowly and solemnly, "I presume, Christina, that you are taught grammar at school."

"Uh-ha," said Christina lightly, looking up from the latest number of *The Society Novelist*.

Miss Purvis adopted a tone of voice which, she understood, was quite withering.

"Perhaps I ought to have said, Christina, that an *attempt* has been made to teach you grammar at school."

"Hooch, ay!" returned Christina placidly. "Ha'e ye read this yin, auntie?" she inquired, tapping the novelette. "It's a fair corker. It's about a bewtyus young leddy that's supposed to ha'e gi'ed her granny poison in her gruel for to get her siller to gi'e to her young man that's a crackt officer in a dashin' regiment. The young man's in debt, ye see, an' she——"

"That will do, Christina. How often have I told you that you are too young to read novels? Give it to me, and attend to what I say." Miss Purvis held out her hand for the novelette, which her niece resigned with reluctance.

"Now," continued Miss Purvis, "I am going

to give you a lesson in grammar. It seems to me that grammar is not properly taught now-a-days. When I was a girl at school I got a prize for grammar alone——"

"They're no' sae free wi' the prizes noo-a-days," remarked Christina.

Miss Purvis rose with dignity, and from a small shelf on the wall took down a slim volume, bound in black cloth and rebacked with strips of linen.

"This," she said, "is my old grammar."

"I thocht it was maybe yer prize, auntie," said Christina. "Ye've no' kep' it extra weel."

Miss Purvis ignored the observation. "I intend to give you a short lesson from this book every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening——"

"Murder, polis!" cried Christina.

"Christina! Don't dare to use that expression in my presence!"

"Weel, I've plenty lessons already. An' I've got my ain grammar," said the girl protestingly. "Gi'e's a chance, auntie."

"My child," returned the spinster more gently, yet still firmly, "you must learn to speak properly. It isn't your shocking expressions alone that grieve me, it is your utter disregard of all the rules of grammar. You may find the lessons hard just now, but you will thank me some day."

"What d'ye want me to dae?" Christina asked in a dull voice.

"I wish you to attend to me. . . . Now, we shall begin at the very beginning." Miss Purvis opened the book.

"Haud on a meenute, auntie!"

"Say, 'Wait a minute, please,'" Miss Purvis said patiently.

"Wait a meenute, please," the girl repeated.

"Certainly," said the aunt, with grave politeness. "What do you wish to say, Christina?"

Christina smiled. "Did ye say I was to get a lesson on Monday, Wednesday, an' Friday?"

"Yes, dear."

"Aweel, this is Thursday!" Christina's tone was triumphant.

"That is true," said Miss Purvis, recovering herself. "But we may as well make a beginning to-night, and perhaps miss a lesson some night later on. Now, pay attention, Christina. . . . The first thing we have to do is to learn what grammar is. What is grammar?"

"Dear knows," Christina gloomily replied.

"Christina!"

"Ach, weel, I dinna ken, an' I'm no' heedin'," Christina said, with some irritation.

"I ask you once more—what is grammar?" Miss Purvis spoke as sternly as she could. "What is grammar?"

The girl picked up the poker, and began to toy with it.

"Put down the poker at once, Christina!"

Christina dropped it clattering on the fender.

"Pick it up and lay it down quietly," said Miss Purvis.

Christina picked it up and laid it down with a single bang.

"I said *quietly*, Christina."

"I heard ye."

There was a long silence.

At last Christina picked up the poker again, and laid it down without a sound.

"Onything for peace," she muttered. Then, catching sight of her aunt's countenance, which was more sad than angry, she repented. "Tell us what grammar is, auntie," she said respectfully.

The simple soul of Miss Purvis was at once touched and gratified.

"I'll tell you with pleasure, my dear," she said kindly. "And, Christina, you must not think that I am going to give you lessons just to give you trouble. It is for your own good. Don't you believe that?"

"Uh-ha," said Christina awkwardly. "I ken ye mean weel."

Miss Purvis nodded cheerfully, and lifted the battered book from her lap.

"Now for our definition of grammar, Christina! Grammar," she began, opening the book, "Grammar is——"

It was most unfortunate that the first page of the grammar was missing. Miss Purvis flushed hotly as she suddenly remembered tear-

ing it out to enwrap a piece of toffee given her by a classmate. How far off her school-days had seemed—until this moment!

"Grammar, Christina," she resumed feebly, "Grammar is——"

Not for the life of her could she recollect the definition which she had once learned from the now missing page.

Christina regarded her with sympathetic concern. "Dinna fash yersel'," she said, at last, softly. "It's nae odds to me. I'm no' heedin'. Grammar's jist grammar, an' that's a' aboot it. Eh?"

Miss Purvis passed a hand over her brow. "It's very extraordinary," she murmured; "but somehow I seem to have forgotten the exact words. Grammar is——. Grammar is——. No! I cannot remember them." And she fell to gazing at her own name, written on the inside of the cover in a schoolgirl hand and followed by the undoubtedly full address of her residence: "Mary Jane Purvis, 12 Blyth Street, Pilrig, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland, Great Britain, Europe, The World."

She could not help smiling at her youthful folly, and, almost before she knew, Christina was looking over her shoulder.

"Oh, Jamaica!" exclaimed Christina. "Was't you that drew thur funny wee men, auntie?"

"Funny wee men!" Miss Purvis cried in horror, her eyes lighting on several tiny pencil

sketches above and below her name and address.

She made to close the book, but Christina caught hold of it, pulled it from her, skipped across the room in an ecstasy of mirth, and finally fell into a chair with peals of laughter.

"Oh, the funny wee men!" she gasped. "My! it's you for the comic, auntie, it's you for the comic!"

"Come, my dear," said her aunt, laughing in a shamed fashion, "give me back the book. I think I can remember the definition now."

But Christina, turning to the end of the volume, found more sketches.

"Here yin wi' bowly legs!" she announced, "an' here anither wi'——"

"Christina!" the spinster remonstrated.

But Christina was beyond control. "Wha was Maister M'Fadyen?" she inquired.

"Mr. M'Fadyen," replied Miss Purvis, restraining herself, "was my most respected master. He taught English and——"

"Fine ham! He's the bowly-leggit yin, an' ye've wrote ablow * him, 'Mr. M'Fadyen is a pig!' My! but it's you for the comic! Was ye no' feart to write thur things on yer book, eh?"

Miss Purvis rose, trembling.

"Christina, give me the book at once."

The girl looked at her aunt. "I didna mean to vex ye, auntie," she said remorsefully, and did as requested.

"Christina," continued Miss Purvis, her an-

* *Ablow*=below.

ger evaporating at once. "I'm thinking of doing some tidying-up in the shop before bed-time. Would you like to help me?"

"Fine!"

"And," added Miss Purvis, with an effort, "we'll begin our grammar lesson in earnest next Monday."

"Hooch, ay!" said Christina cheerfully. "But did *you* no' think grammar lessons was rubbidge when *you* was at the schule, auntie?" she asked in a confidential whisper.

"*Were*," corrected Miss Purvis. "Grammar lessons *were* rubbish, Christina," she said, never suspecting the trap set for her.

"I thocht that!" cried Christina. "My, it's you for the comic!"

VIII

THE INVENTORY

"DO be careful, Christina," Miss Purvis implored, nervously regarding her niece, who, perched on the top step of the shop ladder, was engaged in removing sundry dusty packages from a high shelf.

"Dinna excite!" returned Christina reassuringly. "Mind yer nut, auntie!" she added; "I'm gaun to drap this yin."

A large empty cardboard box fell at the spinster's feet.

"Christina, I cannot allow you to address me in that disrespectful fashion!" Miss Purvis cried indignantly. "Mind my nut, indeed! What do you mean by it?"

"Och, ye ken fine what yer nut is, auntie. Staun' back a bit. I'm gaun to drap anither yin. What d'ye keep a' thae auld emp'y boaxes for? Eh? My!" went on Christina, without waiting for an answer, "there an' awfu' rubbidge up here! I suppose ye've never cleaned this shelf afore. See the dirt!" She swept a heavy cloud of dust from the shelf. "That'll be ten year auld onywey——"

Miss Purvis sneezed violently as the cloud enveloped her.

"Chape snuff!" remarked Christina pleasantly.

"Allow me to tell you, Christina," said Miss Purvis, in her most dignified voice, which, however, was half-choked, "allow me to tell you that every shelf in my shop was thoroughly cleaned exactly a year ago."

Christina very nearly exclaimed "Fine ham!" but checked herself in time, and merely observed, "That's peculiar!"

"And," continued Miss Purvis, "I forbid you to touch the shelves without a damp cloth. Wait till I get you one."

"Bring a dizzen when ye're at it, auntie. Ye could plant tatties up here! Are ye sure ye didna forget *this* shelf last year?"

"If you say another word Christina," said Miss Purvis warmly, "I shall send you to bed, and do my stock-taking myself. Such impertinence I never heard!" She hurried off to procure the damp cloth.

"She's got her monkey up the nicht!" murmured Christina. "I suppose she was vexed at Baldyin no' comin' the day."

It had been a stormy day, and the steamer had been unable to make the pier. Miss Purvis had closed the shop earlier than usual in order to get through her "annual stock-taking," which really consisted of a "spring-cleaning" combined with considerable mourning over goods regarded as hopelessly unsaleable.

When the shelves had been cleaned the aunt and niece refreshed themselves with tea. Thereafter they returned to the shop.

Miss Purvis sighed as she surveyed the piles and heaps of goods that were to be replaced on the shelves.

"I'm sure I might as well throw half these parcels into the sea," she said sadly.

"Ay," said Christina sympathetically, "ye've a queer lot of rubbidge in yer shope, auntie. But ye're no' buyin' as muckle rubbidge as ye did afore I cam' to ye," she continued encouragingly. "Ye see, ye've nae notion o' what the weans like. Baldyin's jist the same. I ken he doesna *mean* to diddle ye wi' toys that winna sell. He jist doesna ken what weans like. Him an' you are a pair, an'——"

"That will do, Christina. You talk too much."

"Hooch, ay! But a' the same, ye ken it's true what I'm sayin'. Ye see, it's no' that lang since I was a wean masel', an' so I can mind what weans like. You an' Baldyin ha'e forgot. D'ye see, auntie?"

Miss Purvis smiled. Somehow she could not help smiling. With a light pat on the girl's head she said—

"Really, Christina, you are an extraordinary child. But come! We must hurry and get these things back on the shelves. It's nearly ten o'clock."

Christina fell to work at once, but she had

not replaced a dozen packages when she severely startled her aunt by giving a loud shout and jumping from the fourth step of the ladder.

"Oh! Christina!" wailed Miss Purvis, sitting down on a doll's house (unsaleable) and crushing it flat.

Christina flew to her and assisted her to rise.

"Did ye hurt yersel'? What for did ye dae that? My! it's a guid thing ye didna smash the hauf-dizzen o' Noah's Arks that cam' in yesterday. I was feart ye had done for them——"

"Oh! Christina! you gave me such a fright! What made you jump from the ladder?"

"I jamp because I got a notion suddenlike—a rare notion. But are ye a' richt noo?"

"I—I think so. But you must try to be more careful. Now, get back to your work. It's getting so late." Miss Purvis began to gather up the fragments of the ruined house.

"Aw, haud on a shake, auntie, till ye hear ma notion! It's a clinker! What d'ye say to ha'e a chape sale an' get quit o' the auld rubbidge, eh?"

"A cheap sale?"

"Uh-ha! Like what the big shopes ha'e in Glesca. What they ca' a Monster Jumbo and Rubbidge Sale. Eh? Ye ken what I mean, auntie?"

"Oh, yes; but, my dear," said Miss Purvis, shaking her head, "this is not Glasgow. It

would simply make me look ridiculous to have a sale in my little shop."

"Nae fears! It wudna mak' *you* look rideec'lous. It wud maybe mak' yer customers look that wey; but what's the odds? My! it wud be fine to get quit o' a heap o' stuff, at rejooced prices. We wadna need to rejooce prices that muckle either; ye could get tickets wi' *rejooced* in big letters, an' that wud temp' the folk. It wud be fine fun forbye! Are ye on?"

"Am I on what?"

"On for a Monster Jumbo Sale? Och, say ye'll dae it, auntie! Come on, noo! Dinna be feart. I'll help ye. I'll polish up a' the auld things till they look like new. I'll tell the lassies at the schule to save their pennies. I'll get a' the weans to badger their mithers for maiks *——"

"No, no, Christina! I cannot have that sort of thing."

"Weel, I'll dae onything ye like, auntie, if ye promise we'll ha'e the sale. Ye see," Christina rattled on, quivering with enthusiasm, "ye see, auntie, a' ye've got to dae is to write the printer an' get some big bills wi' *Great Sale* on them, an' stick them on the winda, an' a lot o' cairds wi' *Rejooced* on them for—— ."

Gently but firmly Miss Purvis interrupted the girl. "No, no, Christina! I couldn't think of having a sale. I know you mean well, my dear, but you must not think any more about it. A sale would be sure to be a frightful fail-

Maik=a halfpenny.

ure, and we should be ashamed of it for ever after."

"No' me!" said Christina stoutly. "But the sale wudna be a failure. I'll bet ye a thousan' pounds to a rotten aiple——"

"Oh! Christina, Christina!"

"Weel, I'll bet ye onything ye like. Come on, auntie! Ye're awfu' henny!"

"My dear child," said Miss Purvis, a little impatiently, "I have already said 'No.' Now let us get these things put back on the shelves. We have wasted too much time already." She picked up several packages. "Now, Christina, if you will get up on the steps—be careful, mind—I shall hand the things up to you."

But Christina did not go near the steps. She squatted on the floor where she was, and looked grimly at her aunt.

"I'm on strike," she said deliberately.

Threats and pleadings failed to produce any effect on Christina.

"You are not only naughty, but also extremely silly," said the exasperated Miss Purvis at last. "It's eleven o'clock. If you won't help me, you had better go to bed."

"I'm enjoyin' masel' fine whaur I am," said Christina untruthfully. She was suffering from a sleeping foot. "See an' no' dae a backfa' aff the ladder."

"I do not intend to use the ladder," said

Miss Purvis, whose ankle was still weak. She spoke coldly even haughtily.

"Whaur's yer wings?" inquired Christina.

Whereupon Miss Purvis, wearied and worried, burst into tears. "You are a cruel girl!" she sobbed. "I am going to bed. I shall leave everything as it is. I don't care how the shop looks to-morrow. I don't care if I am ruined. I—I don't care——"

She was interrupted by Christina falling upon her neck. "I'm sorry, auntie," said Christina, some thirty-odd times.

They got to bed about 2 A.M.—after Christina had put the last package in its place, and after Miss Purvis, touched by her niece's frantic devotion to duty, had promised that a cheap sale would be inaugurated within a fortnight.

IX

THE CHEAP SALE

ON the first morning of the sale Christina set out for school at the usual hour, but not in her usual spirits. Miss Purvis sought to comfort her with the promise that she would be allowed to help in the shop after school hours; but Christina's extreme disappointment was not so easily cured. Until the last moment the girl had hoped that her aunt would allow her to miss school for one day at least, and as she left the shop she could hardly see the bills in the window for tears.

Within half-an-hour, however, her depression was changed into delight. She burst into the shop with an ear-piercing whoop, and danced wildly in front of a table laden with articles, each of which was ticketed with a large "6."

"Christina, what has happened?" cried Miss Purvis, whose only customer so far had been a child demanding change for a penny.

"Measles!" shouted Christina jubilantly.

"What?"

"Measles, auntie! A lot o' the weans has got measles, an' the schule's to be shut for a fortnicht. Is that no' champion? I'll no' miss ony o' the sale noo!" Christina danced round

behind the counter, and came to rest beside her relative.

"Measles! How dreadful!" sighed Miss Purvis. "I do hope you aren't going to——"

"Och, I had them when I was young," said Christina. "Ye needna be feart for me, auntie. But is't no' champion? You an' me'll ha'e fine fun thegether. Eh?"

"Of—of course I shall be glad of your—help, Christina," said Miss Purvis, feeling her niece's eye upon her. "How long did you say the school was to be closed?"

"A fortnicht—maybe langer, if mair weans gets the measles. Jessie Ann M'Kirdy promised me she wud try an' get them frae her wee brither next week, so we'll maybe get a month's holiday."

Miss Purvis looked horrified, but said nothing.

"Hoo ha'e ye been gettin' on?" inquired Christina, coming to business.

"There has been nothing doing so far," replied the other, endeavouring to speak naturally. The prospect of Christina's company in the shop for weeks was almost too much for her. "I'm afraid our sale is going to be a disappointment," she added despondently; "I feel it in my bones."

"That's jist yer rheumatics, auntie," said Christina cheerfully. "It's early yet. I ken o' twa-three folk that'll be comin' to buy the day."

"Oh! Christina! You don't mean to say that you have been *asking* people to come——"

"What for no'? There's the doctor's leddy, an' Mistress Beaton, an' a frien' o' Mistress Beaton's that's comin' to buy heaps o' yer auld toys for a children's hospital. I didna mean to let bug aboot it—I meant to surprise ye—but I see ye're needin' something to cheer ye up. A face like a fiddle doesna bring custom."

"I'm sure you meant well," said Miss Purvis, "but I wish you had not——"

"I wish ye had got bigger bills for the winda," Christina remarked. "Thur yins is nae show. An' ye should ha'e got them printit wi' *Great Sale,* no' jist *Sale.* But never heed, auntie. We'll manage fine. I hope we sell a lot o' the saxpenny things. Some o' them's been terrible rejooced. D'ye no' think we micht get mair nor saxpence for the bottles o' scent an' the cork-soles. Eh, auntie?"

Miss Purvis shook her head. "I should never have bought perfume to retail at a shilling, and there are so many cheaper qualities of soles on the market now-a-days."

"Whisht!" said Christina suddenly. "Here somebody comin'! Oh, it's jist Miss M'Indoe. We'll no' get muckle oot o' her. She'll be wantin' to knock doon yer rejooced prices, auntie. Dinna be saft wi' her."

"Hush, Christina!"

A prim lady entered the shop and, after greeting Miss Purvis, announced that she had

just come in to take a look round, not that she really required anything at the moment.

While Miss Purvis, with sundry remarks on the weather, was directing the customer's attention to goods laid out on the counter, Christina went quietly round to the table bearing the sixpenny bargains. There she stood at attention.

Ere long Flora was disgusted to observe that her aunt was weak enough to accept ninepence for a photo-frame which had already been reduced to a shilling.

At last Miss M'Indoe came over to the table.

"Ninepence each, mem," said Christina in a low respectful tone of voice. "They're terrible rejooced," she added.

Miss M'Indoe fingered a bottle of "White Rose," and sniffed disdainfully.

"Ye can tak' twa things for a shillin', mem," whispered Christina, "if—if ye'll no' tell onybody."

And the end of it was that Miss M'Indoe purchased a bottle of perfume and a little yellow box "made of wood that grew near Burns's cottage"—in Germany.

No sooner had the lady departed than Christina was rejoiced by the entrance of Mrs. MacDougall's maid, the Stornoway girl whom she had befriended at the doctor's door. Flora had just received her first month's wages and desired to buy something to send home to her mother.

Miss Purvis, being free, would have attended to the girl, but Christina gave her a look which plainly said "Leave this to me!" And ere long Miss Purvis was engaged with the minister, who required a particular sort of twine which Miss Purvis *knew* she had, if she could only lay hands on it. She was getting rather flurried when Christina quietly observed—

"You'll get the twine in the broon boax, in the third drawer, ablow the shelf whaur ye keep the hair-ile, auntie."

"Christina knows the business, Miss Purvis," Mr. Beaton remarked, smiling. And Christina glowed with pride while she showed Flora framed photographs of Kilmabeg.

"Ye should buy yin o' thur, Flora," she advised. "See! here yin wi' Mistress MacDougall's hoose in it. Yer mither wud like fine to see whaur ye are. Eh?"

"Put I will haf peen sending my sister a post-card wis that same picture a week pefore to-morrow," said Flora.

"But it wud be nice for ye to ha'e this pictur', Flora, if ye was leavin' yer place here. Eh?"

"Well, well, I will pe thinking apout it, Teeny. Now I will pe puying somesing my mother can mek use for."

"This wey for the bargains, then!" said Christina briskly, and led the way to the sixpenny table. "Ninepence each," she whispered, with a comprehensive wave of her hand. "But,

seein' yer a frien' o' mines, Flora, I'll rejooce it to saxpence."

Whereupon Flora beamed, and within the space of twenty minutes fell to four separate temptations, including a pair of cork soles.

"Weel, auntie," remarked Christina, when the twain were alone, about mid-day, "we're no' daein' that bad—are we?"

"Indeed," returned Miss Purvis, quite brightly, "I think we are doing very well."

"Hooray!" cried Christina. "An' the leddies ha'e to come yet! It'll be a busy day afore it's done, auntie! My! is't no' champion aboot the measles?"

"You must not rejoice at the misfortunes of other people, Christina," said her aunt solemnly. "The measles must be making a number of people very wretched at this very moment."

"Ay, they're awfu' kitly* things, the measles. Are ye no' gettin' hungry, auntie? I think we best get wur dinner early, an' be ready for the rush i' the efternune. Hoo's yer rheumatics noo?"

Miss Purvis smiled. "They seem to have gone, dear," she answered. Then the smile vanished.

"Christina!"

"Uh-ha?"

"Who turned all the price-tickets upside down?"

* *Kitly*=tickly.

"Me!" said Christina proudly. "I done it to cod Miss M'Indoe. Ye've got to be fly for her. So I turned a' the saxes into nines, an' tell't her she could buy twa things for a shillin', if she didna tell onybody. I hope she tells everybody!"

"Christina, go and put the tickets right at once."

"What wey? Ye'll sell faur mair things if the customers think they're knockin' doon yer prices. It's fair enough—is't no'?"

Miss Purvis looked doubtful. To her the method seemed barely honest and very undignified.

"I'll change them, if ye like," said Christina at last, "but if Miss M'Indoe comes in again, ye'll be nickit, auntie."

And Miss Purvis was thenceforth speechless on the question.

The sale lasted ten days, and the total result, if not all that Christina had expected, was a great deal more than her aunt had dared to hope for.

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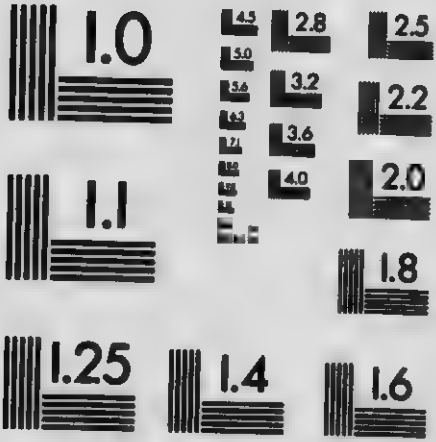

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X

"OWER AULD FOR TRUE LOVE"

THE piermaster had assured her that the afternoon steamer would not risk calling at Kilmabeg in such a gale; but at thirteen one hopes all things, and Christina stood alone on the pier, grasping the rail with her right hand and holding on her black straw hat with her left. Rain and spray splashed her face and pattered on her shabby old waterproof; her fair hair, which had been loosened from a score of tight little pigtails that morning, and whose waviness she had so admired when her aunt was not looking, flapped heavily behind her, a sodden mass. In her anxiety to be on the pier in good time, she had omitted to tuck it inside her waterproof, as she usually did in wet weather.

The steamer was already nearly an hour late. Apparently it had experienced difficulties in taking the other piers on the route; and Kilmabeg was not only the most exposed, but also the least important pier of all. Yet Christina waited, though she wondered uncomfortably what her aunt would be thinking in the little newspaper and fancy-goods shop along in the village.

At last, high above the rocky point whereon the waves broke furiously, appeared scurrying wisps of smoke, then a reeling red funnel; and presently the steamer staggered into sight, the paddles beating water and air alternately, the bow throwing up clouds of spray. A minute later Christina sighed hopelessly. The pier-master had been right. The steamer was giving Kilmabeg a wide berth.

Disconsolate, the girl turned away.

"It's a' up a gum-tree," she muttered. "Baldwin 'll no' be here the day. He'll no' likely come noo for anither month."

She wended her way over the cobbles of the deserted pier, and thence along the road, till she reached the little shop, above the door of which was the simple inscription—"M. J. Purvis, Stationer and Newsagent." For a year now this little shop and the dwelling-room behind it had been Christina's home.

At the door of the shop the girl halted, stepped aside, and peered in at the window. But there were so many articles in the window that she could see nothing but her aunt's nose, which was just visible between the gable of a Noah's Ark and the edge of a chest-protector.

Still, that was something for an observant girl like Christina to build upon—though, to be sure, it was quite an ordinary-sized nose; a little sharp, perhaps, and sensitive to low temperatures, but by no means badly shaped. The

nose remained stationary, and Christina noted that it supported glasses.

"She's pretendin' for to be addin' up her ledger," the girl reflected. "That's what she aye does when she's expectin' Baldyin. If I was her, I wud be readin' a love-story. . . . She's got on her best blouse, an' the fancy collar wi' the pink bow. . . . An' he's no' comin'! Oh, Jamaica! what an iron o' fate!" Christina, it should be mentioned, had recently taken to reading, with more avidity than ever, the penny novelettes which Miss Purvis, as she had more than once explained, was *compelled* to stock to meet the public's demand.

Christina sighed as she turned away from the window, and after a little hesitation entered the shop.

"Fine day for the jucks," she remarked sarcastically. "The boat——"

"Christina, where *have* you been?" cried Miss Purvis, sitting up and removing her glasses. "You had only the one paper to deliver at the doctor's, and——"

"I was on the pier, auntie. The boat didna ca'. It was ower stormy. Rotten weather—eh?"

"Christina! I have asked you frequently not to use that word. Rotten means decayed. You should say that the weather is most disagreeable. I have been in Kilmabeg for twelve years now, and I have certainly never seen such weather in the month of April. But, my child!

you are soaking. Change your wet things at once."

"Hooch, ay!" said Christina, with affected cheerfulness. "I suppose," she added, "Baldyin 'll no' be here the day."

Miss Purvis looked her severest. "Really, Christina, you must try to cultivate some respect for people, even if you do not particularly admire them. Mr. Baldwin——"

Christina laughed. "Ye ken fine I'm jist jokin', auntie. I ca' him Baldyin because he *is* a bald yin—he's as bald as a plate. But it's jist ma pet name for him. I like him fine. 'Deed, there's no' mony like him—Maister Baldwin. But," she continued, ere the other could speak, "what's to be done? We're oot o' jumpin'-jakes, an' penny whistles, an' ha'penny jew's harps, an' farden dolls an' penny pistols, an'——"

"We must just write to Bunting & Co. for what we require. Now go and change your wet things, dear."

"Ah, but ye ken fine we never get the same quality when we write as when we gi'e the order to Baldyin—I mean Maister Baldwin. I've heard ye say it yersel', auntie."

"Well, well, Christina, it cannot be helped on this occasion. We cannot control the weather." Miss Purvis suppressed a sigh.

"Control yer granny!" muttered Christina. "Ye should write to Maister Baldwin hissel'," she said aloud, "an' he'll see that ye get the

best quality. But it's an awfu' sin the boat didna ca'. It's time we was thinkin' o' wur summer novelties—spades an' pails, an' fishin'-lines an' hooks, an' bathin' pants' an——"

"Christina, I have already asked you to change your wet things," said Miss Purvis firmly.

"I heard ye, auntie. But think o' Baldyin on the boat—maybe sea-seeck—wi' a' his samples, an' no' able to gi'e us even a squint at them——"

"What do you mean by *squint*, Christina?"

"A keek—a look—a—oh, ye ken fine what I mean, auntie! But what's the odds, as long as ye're happy? . . . D'ye think Baldyin 'll be sea-seeck on the boat?"

Apparently Miss Purvis did not hear the question. She bent over her ledger and adjusted her glasses on her nose. They fell off, and she picked them up and re-adjusted them. Her face grew slightly pink.

"I'll awa' an' change," said Christina. "But dinna write for onything till I see the list o' wanteds," she added, and hurried through the door into the dwelling-room.

Closing the door carefully behind her, she skipped round the table several times. Then she paused, and in a hoarse whisper said—

"Oh, Jamaica! She loves him!"

For the last six months it had been Christina's ambition to witness the arrangement of a match between her aunt and the gentleman

who travelled for the wholesale toy firm in Glasgow. She admired Mr. Baldwin as a man—he had given her a new sixpence on his last Christmas visit—and she felt she could love him as an uncle. Moreover, she fancied that he regarded her aunt with rather more than the eyes of stern business. How did her aunt regard him?

Christina's idea in going to the pier that forenoon had been this. She would wait until she saw Mr. Baldwin actually ashore; then she would speed along to the shop and inform Miss Purvis that Mr. Baldwin was *not* coming; and when Mr. Baldwin *did* appear unexpectedly she would be watching her aunt's countenance. The weather had spoilt her little scheme, but now she felt that she had found out half of what she wanted to know, in spite of the weather.

"She loves him!"

Having removed her hat and waterproof, Christina sat down in the old easy-chair by the fire and hugged herself. Coming back to earth for a brief space, she took off one of her boots. Then soaring once more, she hugged herself again till, throwing herself back in an ecstasy of mirthful delight, she felt her clammy hair against the nape of her neck.

Suddenly sobered, she got up and inspected herself in the hanging mirror.

"Oh, leeks!" she groaned at the sight of her hair.

At that moment she heard the shop door opened, and the next she fairly jumped to recognize the hearty voice of Mr. Baldwin.

"Awful weather, Miss Purvis," he said. "And how are you? I drove round from Kinlochan. Couldn't afford to miss a good customer like yourself, you know." He laughed. "Well, and how's business?"

The reply of Miss Purvis was inaudible to Christina.

"You are looking remarkably well," she heard Mr. Baldwin say, as he dumped a case of samples on the counter. "Remarkably well!"

"Can this be love?" muttered Christina, creeping to the door and peeping through a tiny hole in the curtain which covered the glazed portion. "Can this be love?"

"And how is Christina?" inquired Mr. Baldwin.

The girl was tempted to answer for herself, but remembered her dishevelled condition. It would never do to affront her aunt at such a critical juncture.

Then, to her dismay, Miss Purvis proceeded calmly to pay an account, which Mr. Baldwin receipted without the slightest sign of emotion. And afterwards they discussed toys—toys!

Christina was disgusted. She was quite sure that Mr. Baldwin had blushed on his last visit, and her hopes had run high. She returned to the easy-chair, and sat there, gloomily contemplating an incipient hole in the toe of her stock-

ing, while now and then Mr. Baldwin's voice reached her ears in such phrases as "ninepence a dozen," "two and eleven the gross," "quite a novelty," and "I assure you, Miss Purvis, that the paint cannot be licked off."

"He loves her not!" she muttered at last, in despair. "It's a' up a gum-tree! But I believe he micht love her, if she jist gi'ed him a wee bit encouragement. I'll ha'e anither squint at them."

Alas! the scene that met her gaze was not calculated to inspire sentiment. The clean-shaven, rosy gentleman was gravely demonstrating to the lady the correct method of working the latest type of mechanical nigger, and the lady was looking on as though her whole future depended on an exact knowledge of the mechanism.

"Oh, Jamaica!" sighed Christina. "I doot they're ower auld for true love." Their age had all along been an objection in her estimation, though she had not yet admitted it to be insuperable to romance. "Maybe auntie's no' really carin'—her an' him was maybe jist ha'ein' a wee flurtation to theirsel's the last time he was here. Oh, my! but ma feet is cauld!"

She returned to the fire, and over a novelette tried to imagine herself dispensing a love-potion—whatever that might be—to the indifferent couple.

The shutting of the shop door roused her, but

she kept her eyes on the page when Miss Purvis, a little pinker than usual, came in.

"Christina, why haven't you changed your stockings?"

"They're no' wat, auntie. Baldyin's in an awfu' hurry the day, surely. Eh?"

"Mr. Baldwin had to hasten back to Kinlochan to catch the steamer from there. He asked very kindly for you, Christina."

"Did he?"

Miss Purvis lifted the kettle from the hob and carried it to the sink.

"I'll mak' the tea, auntie, in a meenute," said Christina. "Jist wait till I feenish this page."

"What is it you are reading? I'm sure you'll be glad when the holidays are over," Miss Purvis remarked pleasantly. "I'm afraid you are reading too many of these trashy novelettes at present."

"Ye read them yersel'," retorted Christina. "I've seen ye greetin' ower them."

"You are too young for such things," said Miss Purvis severely. "What are you reading? The *Mayfair Novelist*. Why, that's the worst of them all. You——"

"The last number's a corker! It's"—here Christina looked hard at her aunt—"it's *a tale o' love an' passion!*"

"Christina," said Miss Purvis coldly, "there's a hole in your stocking."

"I ken. Hoo could get ma foot in if there was nae hole?"

"You are a very rude girl!"

"Hooch, ay!" Christina murmured in a tired voice. "Did ye ask Baldyin if he was sea-seeck in the boat?" she inquired abruptly.

Miss Purvis reddened. "Really, Christina!"

"I beg your paurdon, auntie." The girl's voice was apologetic, but to herself she was saying, "She loves him—some. I'll ha'e to see Baldyin masel' next time—in private."

XI

THE GUM THAT STUCK

CHRISTINA entered the shop and flung her bag of school-books into a corner, remarking that she was awful glad it was Friday.

"That is not the proper way to treat your good books," said her aunt mildly. "Books should be treated with care and respect."

Christina smiled. "Like the books *you* had when *you* was at the schule," she returned. "Like yer auld grammar, wi' the front pages tore oot an' drawin' o' wee men on near every page. Eh, auntie?"

Any reply of Miss Purvis was prevented by the entrance of a small boy, who slammed a copper on the counter and demanded "a penny's worth 'o sling elastic."

"I do not keep elastic for catapults, my boy," said Miss Purvis gravely.

"Oh, d'ye no'? Aw, weel, gi'e's a ha'p'ny pea-shooter."

"I do not keep pea-shooters."

The small boy looked disgusted as well as disappointed.

"Catapults and pea-shooters are very dangerous things," the spinster said in solemn

tones. "You might put some'ody's eye out, you know."

The small boy grinned, picked up his penny, and retired. At the door, however, he halted. With a wink to Christina, he put the question—

"D'ye keep gum?"

"I do," pleasantly replied Miss Purvis.

"Weel, stick it!" he cried, and disappeared.

"That," said Miss Purvis indignantly, "is the most impertinent boy in Kilmabeg."

"I'll warm his ears the first time I catch him," said Christina. "But a' the same, auntie, ye should keep elastic an' pea-shooters. That's the tenth boy——"

"I will never be a party to the maiming of my fellow creatures and dumb animals, Christina. I have never kept elastic for catapults, nor pea-shooters, and I never intend to do so."

"Weel, ye're jist throwin' away guid custom. I wud advise ye to gi'e Baldyin an order when he comes the day for three yards o'——"

"You must allow me to manage my own business, Christina."

"Hooch, ay! Keep yer hair on!"

"Christina! I cannot permit——"

"Oh, weel, let it off then. But ye're no' hauf up to date, auntie. What's the use o' keepin' a shope, if ye dinna stock what's wantit? Ye're no' as faur behind the times as ye was when I first cam' here, but there's plenty o' things still ye could sell, if ye had them."

"That will do, Christina. You must——"

"I'm sure I've pit ye on to heaps o' things that ha'e selled like winkin'. D'ye no' mind when I pit ye on to peevers? Ye hadna a peever in the shope when I cam' here, and since then ye've selled dizzens."

"Sold, Christina," said Miss Purvis. "When *will* you learn to speak correctly? Yes, I am quite aware that you have made a number of useful suggestions for the shop, my dear. At the same time, there are certain things which nothing would induce me to keep——"

"Oh, there the boat comin'!" cried the girl, and bolted into the back room, where she spent some minutes in washing her hands and face, tidying her hair, and exchanging her old hat for her Sunday one. She wished that she could have changed her rough boots for her neat Sunday ones, but calculated that she could not spare the time.

On her reappearance in the shop Miss Purvis looked up from the ledger.

"Are you going out, Christina? Why have you put on your good hat?"

"It's needin' the fresh air, auntie, an' ma latest mash prefers it."

"Your what?"

"Ma adorin' swine—ma lovey-dovey young man! Ye needna sit up for me. Ta-ta! Love an' kisses to Baldyin."

Miss Purvis opened her mouth, but no words came.

With a friendly wave of her hand and a bright smile Christina skipped from the shop, whereupon Miss Purvis sighed heavily, and asked herself what on earth she was to do with her niece.

"I fear the child requires a stronger hand than mine," she said to herself. "Goodness knows I have tried hard to improve her speech and manners, but they seem to grow worse than better. . . . And yet it would be dreadfully dull now without her." Once more she sighed heavily, and bent over the ledger.

On the road in front of the shop Christina halted and watched the steamer being warped to the pier. Presently the gangway was laid aboard, and among the few persons who crossed it she descried the burly form of Mr. Baldwin. She smiled in a satisfied fashion, and turned away in the opposite direction.

"I'll gi'e him till five o'clock," she thought, "an' then I'll catch him when he's gaun back to the pier."

Passing through the straggling village she came to the open road by the loch-side. She seated herself on an ancient bench, whereon countless names and initials had been cut by natives and strangers. It was a fine, mild afternoon, and Christina, having found a piece of toffee in her pocket, placed it in her mouth and looked sentimentally at the still, blue water. The last novelette she had read had been about a young duke who had loved a gov-

erness and, after numerous troubles, married her. It was not so difficult to think of her aunt as a governess, but somehow Mr. Baldwin would not be a duke for more than two seconds at a time. Visions of jumping-jacks and other juvenile joys came in the way. Nevertheless, Christina's imagination carried her to the point where Mr. Baldwin sank on one knee and imprinted burning kisses on the taper fingers of Miss Purvis; and imagination might have carried her even further, had it not been interrupted by a loud snigger and the question—

"Haw, Teeny! What's the price o' yer farden dolls?"

The unseemly interruption was made by the small boy who had insulted her aunt not half-an-hour ago. He was accompanied by another small boy.

Recovering herself, Christina gave both a haughty stare.

"Has yer auntie stuck to her gum yet, Teeny?" inquired the first small boy, whereat his friend guffawed very loudly.

She sprang up and made at the nearest boy, but she was too late, and the pair fled, yelling with laughter.

"Wait till I catch ye, Jimsie M'Phee!" she shouted wrathfully. "Jist you wait!"

Mockery answered her threats, and she was fain to give chase, but restrained herself and resumed her seat, where for some time thoughts of revenge possessed her mind to the utter

exclusion of romantic imaginings. Finally, however, she soothed her soul with a quotation from one, or perhaps more, of the novels she had recently read: "Mark ye, wretch! My turn will come!"

Mr. Baldwin, who was in the stationery as well as the toy "line," had another customer besides Miss Purvis in Kilmabeg, to wit the "general merchant," and it was shortly after he left the latter's shop that Christina met him. She intended to exhibit great surprise on seeing him, and with that idea she approached him, keeping her gaze fixed on the cock on the parish church steeple. Unfortunately, when within a few yards of him her foot caught on a loose stone, and she narrowly escaped a fall.

"Oh, Jamaica!" she muttered crossly, putting back her hat, which had been jerked over her nose, while it occurred to her that, had she been a real heroine, she would have sprained her ankle.

"Why, Christina!" exclaimed Mr. Baldwin, setting down his sample cases. "That was a squeak! How are you? I was afraid I was going to miss you again as I did last month."

They shook hands, and Christina could not remember the polite remarks she had meant to make.

"Are you going to give me your company to the pier?" Mr. Baldwin inquired, picking up his cases.

Christina had intended to say, "With pleasure," but she merely murmured, "Uh-ha!"

"Come along, then," he returned cheerfully. "I think the boat is about due. I was glad to see your aunt looking so well to-day."

"Did she give ye an order for sling-elastic and pea-shooters?"

"No! did she intend to?"

"Ah, weel," said the girl, resisting temptation, "we'll see aboot them the next time ye come. How's business?" In talking to Mr. Baldwin she endeavoured to speak as much like her aunt as possible, though, to be sure, it was rather difficult.

"Business is not so bad as I've seen it," he replied. "And how is school?"

"Rotten!—I mean to say it's most disagreeable. I would rather be workin' in the shop."

"Yes," he said, checking a laugh; "but you'll get plenty of the shop in good time. Miss Purvis tells me you are becoming a great reader, but——"

"Ay! I'm a demon for readin'! So is she."

"But she seems to be afraid that you do not care for the best—er—literature."

"I like stories aboot love," said Christina, with a stealthy glance. "So does she."

"Quite so. But there are different kinds of love stories. Now, I think you should allow your aunt to choose your reading in the meantime. What do you th'nk, Christina?"

Christina thought it very disappointing that

he had not blushed at the mention of the word "love," but she only said, "Uh-ha!"

"That's right!" returned Mr. Baldwin, and was about to change the subject when she inquired whether he liked love stories.

He laughed, remarking that he was rather old for that sort of thing, just as Christina was rather young.

"Ye're no' that auld," said she.

"How old do you think I am?"

"Fifty-three," she guessed wildly.

"Oh no; I'm not quite that age—nearly ten years younger."

"That's no' sae bad. Hoo long ha'e ye been comin' to Kilmabeg, Mr. Baldwin?"

"Eight years, at least."

Christina suppressed a sigh. She had often wanted to ask her aunt that question, but had never ventured. Eight years! Love at anything like first sight was now out of the question.

"I was readin' a bewtiful love story last night," she said, with an effort. "It was aboot a bewtiful girl that had bewtiful golden hair." Here she remembered that her aunt's hair was no particular shade of brown. "But it wasna the colour that was sae bewtiful. It was the length. When the bad man in the story seized her alibaster arm an' hissed in her ears, the bewtiful hair fell in a shinin' cascage to her knees, an' she said she would wait for the man she loved—he was in the lock-up for not killin'

another man—she said she would wait for him till she was old an' grey. An' I dare say she would ha'e waited if she had needit to." Christina came to a sudden stop. She had meant to show that the happiness of marriage was not necessarily confined to youth, and that love was possible at any age; but the task now seemed utterly beyond her. Besides, the story seemed to have lost its point. She felt hot and miserable, and was relieved to observe the steamer nearing the pier.

Mr. Baldwin may have seen the moral, though not the point, of the tale, and he said pleasantly, holding out his hand—

"Well, Christina, you must tell me the rest another time. But don't read *too* many love stories. Now, good-bye. I left some sweets for you with Miss Purvis. See you next month, I hope."

Christina turned away, feeling that she had made a fool of herself, and walked slowly and dejectedly home.

"I doot there's naethin' in it," she told herself.

As she drew near the shop Jimsie M'Phee and his companion peeped from an entry and jeered.

"Is yer auntie stickin' yet?"

Christina, trembling with rage, rushed into the shop.

"Is that you, dear?" her aunt called from the back-room. "Tea is nearly ready."

"I'll be back in a meenute," she replied, panting, as she went behind the counter. She did not remain there long, but after doing something that made a faint crackling sound, she went to the door of the shop and looked out. Jimsie M'Phee was still there in the entry, his back towards her. Creeping cautiously along the wall, holding something very carefully in her left hand, she reached the unsuspecting boy and whipped his cap from his head.

Then she ran swiftly along the road, and as she slackened her pace at last she contrived to empty the contents of a penny bottle of gum into the cap.

Then she halted, and Jimsie, furious, came up with her.

"Gi'e me ma bunnet!" he yelled.

"There yer bunnet!" she screeched, and clapped it on his head.

She reached home short of breath, but full of satisfaction. Romance was all very well in its way.

XII

"BACKWARD IN COMING FORWARD"

ON fine Sunday afternoons Christina usually went for a walk with her friend Jessie Ann M'Kirdy, the daughter of the local postmistress. Jessie Ann, who was Christina's senior by eighteen months, had just got a new Sunday frock—a blue print, so long that its hem touched the tops of her boots. She wore her black hair tied back with a bow, and altogether she appeared almost grown-up to the younger girl. Christina was, perhaps, a little envious, but, at the same time, she was heartily proud of her acquaintance with Jessie Ann.

"D'ye think we'll see him the day, Jessie Ann?" she inquired, as they met on the last Sunday in June.

"See who?" said Jessie Ann very carelessly.

"Him. Ye ken who I mean."

Jessie Ann ignored the remark, and turned her steps in the direction unexpected by her companion.

"Oh," cried Christina, "are we no' gaun *up* the loch the day?"

"What for?"

"Oh, jist because it's—nicer up the loch."

Jessie Ann halted and looked reflectively at the sky. "Oh, weel, onything to please ye," she said at last.

Although she was wearing her neat shoes and best stockings, the shortness of her skirts gave Christina considerable dissatisfaction. She had the depressing suspicion that Jessie Ann was growing to regard her as a child, and even the thought of her own five gorgeous hat-pins, borrowed from the shop, failed to sustain her self-confidence.

Kilmabeg was beginning to receive its summer residents, people who had by no means left their "good clothes" at home; and those who had not too freely enjoyed their early dinners were taking the sun and air by the loch-side.

"Oh, what a beautiful hat!" said Christina, with a desperate idea of breaking the oppressive silence.

"What? Miss Ferguson's? That's her last year's done up again. I mind the shape fine. Last year it was turned up an' had grass on it. She has jist turned it doon an' put roses on instead o' the grass. Ye would think folk that took a big hoose like Burnbrae would be able to get new hats," said Jessie Ann. "That hat o' Miss Grogan's is no' sae bad, but it doesna suit a fat face like hers. What dae ye think o' her cos*tume*, Teeny?" It may be mentioned that Jessie had ideas of becoming a dressmaker.

"Oh, it's lovely!" cried Christina, delighted that the silence was broken.

"It wud be lovely if the skirt didna drag, an' if she didna waddle. I hear she's gotten a young man, a' the same."

"Oh!" murmured Christina. "A young man!"

"Ay; the servant-girl was tellin' me. He's comin' to Kilmabeg for next week-end. But he's no' much to look at, I believe."

Christina, who thought that all lovers were good to look at, felt rather chilled, but said nothing.

Jessie Ann continued to criticise—favourably or severely—other examples of dressmaking and millinery on the road, until they reached a bench placed on the turf bordering the shore. Here they seated themselves, Jessie Ann arranging her skirts with elaborate care, while Christina wriggled as though trying to shrink within hers.

Having settled herself at last, the elder girl proceeded to smooth the fingers of her gloves, glancing occasionally up the loch, at the head of which a steamer was moored. The younger followed her glances, but repressed the question which the sight of the steamer suggested—the question which seemed to have, in some way, offended her friend at the beginning of the walk.

Jessie Ann was not, as a rule, given to sedateness, but after she had sat in utter

silence for some twenty minutes Christina realized that some great change must have taken place, and wondered vaguely if the long skirts had aught to do with it.

And then, of a sudden, it flashed on her that Jessie Ann might, after all, be in love. For several Sundays she had violently hoped that Jessie Ann *was* in love, but the latter's apparent disinclination to walk *up* the loch on this particular afternoon had made her put away the happy thought. But now it came back to her. Perhaps Jessie Ann had only been pretending when she started to walk the other way. Christina had read of people pretending all sorts of things when they were in love, and of people's natures being entirely altered.

Oh, if only HE would come down the loch, as HE had done on each of the last Sunday afternoons! Then she might discover the truth.

Christina knew that Jessie Ann would not be fifteen till September, and she had never read of any one being in love under sixteen; but she would not allow any doubts to interfere with the re-arisen hope, and she fell to guessing HIS age and to wondering how long it would be before HE declared his passion.

So far HE had only got the length of once purchasing a penny stamp from Jessie Ann while her mother was engaged in chastizing one of the younger children for putting stones in the letter-box: but since then HE had always

raised his cap on passing the girls, and Christina, though she had giggled involuntarily at these exciting moments, had dreamed afterwards of love at first sight.

Jessie Ann, having removed one of her gloves, was feeling the bow on her hair, when Christina suddenly nudged her.

"Don't!" said Jessie Ann sharply.

"I see him comin'!" whispered Christina, quite unable to control herself.

"See who comin'?" asked Jessie Ann, with some irritation and a sidelong glance up the road. "Ye've an elbow like a pick-axe."

"I didna mean to hurt ye," said Christina humbly.

"Weel, dinna jab me like that again, Teeny," the other returned, more gently. Then she glanced at her skirts, drew in her feet, touched the rose at her young breast, and began to put on her glove.

The junior purser of the steamer came swinging along the road. He was youthful, and exceedingly smart in his serge suit and white-roofed yachting-cap. A pleasant, suntanned countenance was his, and altogether he reminded Christina of the young naval hero in the last number but two of the *Park Lane Novelist*. The young naval hero, too, had fallen in love at first sight, and at the thought thereof the girl quivered with anticipations of she knew not what. Had the junior purser

rushed forward then and there and flung himself at Jessie Ann's feet, Christina would probably have been more thrilled than surprised.

The junior purser, however, did nothing of a thrilling nature. As he drew near he produced and lit a cigarette, slackening his pace while he did so.

Christina glanced at her friend. The latter was staring fixedly and solemnly in front of her.

Christina clasped her hands together very tightly—so tightly that one of her gloves, which Miss Purvis had repaired the previous evening, rent with a faint crack; at the same time her right leg began to curl round her left. She was holding herself together; as a matter of fact, she felt as if she might burst at any moment. Without intending to do so, she emitted a squeak and drove her elbow into her companion's ribs.

"Be quiet!" muttered Jessie Ann, in an awful voice.

"I—I didna mean it."

"Be quiet!"

Christina became quiet, except for her breathing.

The junior purser threw away the spent match with careless grace, and strode forward. It looked almost as if he were not going to observe them at all—but Christina had read that Love was blind. At the same time she wondered whether it would be advisable to

drop her handkerchief, which she reflected gladly was a clean one; she might drop it so that it should appear to be Jessie Ann's.

She glanced inquiringly at her friend, and just at that moment her friend's head fell and rose in precisely the way that the doctor's wife's head fell and rose when the doctor's wife passed the laird's wife in the latter's motor.

Christina's eyes leapt back to the junior purser. He was replacing his hat on his head with one hand and his cigarette in his mouth with the other. But she could not tell whether the "love-light" was in his eyes. He seemed, however, to redden.

She lost command of herself.

"Oh, Jamaica!" she exclaimed, and sniggered helplessly. And was instantly ashamed.

Had she had courage to look she would have seen that Jessie Ann's face was a prey to blushes, though Jessie Ann remained rigid.

Jessie Ann had made her first real bow to a member of the opposite sex.

The junior purser disappeared round a bend in the road.

Then Jessie Ann spoke.

"Can ye no' behave yersel'?" she asked, in an unkind voice.

"I couldna help it," Christina murmured. "I—I thocht he was gaun to speak to ye."

"He wouldna be likely to speak to me when you was there."

"Oh!" It was all Christina had to say. She got up and walked away.

"Here, Teeny, come back!" called Jessie Ann, relenting. "I was jist jokin'."

Christina may not have heard.

The other ran after her and caught her arm.

"Dinna be huffy, Teeny."

"I'm no' huffy."

"What are ye, then?"

"I'm vexed."

"What for?"

"For spiling yer chance, Jessie Ann," said Christina, in a choked voice.

"Oh!" said Jessie Ann, taken aback.

"I kep' him frae speakin' to ye. Oh, I wish I hadna come wi' ye the day."

Jessie Ann hardly knew what to say. She had never really thought of the junior purser speaking to her. Still, perhaps Teeny was right; certainly he *might* have spoken had Teeny not been present. A new sense of importance came to her.

"Aweel," said she at last, possibly a trifle patronizingly, "we'll no' say ony mair aboot it. But ye maun try no' to giggle the next time, Teeny. Young men dinna like to be giggled at."

Christina did not remind her friend that she also had giggled the previous Sunday, but squeezed her friend's arm and promised solemnly never to giggle as long as she lived.

They returned to the seat, better friends than ever.

After a long silence Christina remarked shyly, "Maybe we'll meet him on the road back, Jessie Ann."

Jessie Ann tossed her head.

"I'm no' in the habit o' runnin' efter men," she said haughtily. "I intend for to gang back the high road."

Christina regarded her with admiration. It was almost exactly what one of her recent heroines had done, though, to be sure, the heroine had met the hero after all.

"Ay; I dare say it's best to be coy," she murmured softly.

"What d'ye mean by 'coy'?"

"Oh, weel," stammered the reader of novelettes, "I think it means kin' o' backward in comin' forward, forbye pretendin' ye dinna care a snuff when ye're jist dyin' for him."

"But 'm no' dyin' for onybody. I never seen the man yet I would die for."

"Oh, but ye can never tell beforehand," Christina said sagely. "I believe it whiles comes on ye like a blot from the blue," she went on in a hoarse whisper, carried away by her feelings, "an' ye canna resist the passionate vowels o' the adorin' swine. An' then——"

"Oh, mercy!" cried Jessie Ann. "What's this ye're sayin' aboot roarin' swines an' blue blots?"

"Maybe ye'll ken some day," said Christina,

with much seriousness. Then, earnestly, "Oh, Jessie Ann, what wud ye say if—if he proposed to ye?"

"Och, come on hame, Teeny," the elder girl returned quickly, but not the least crossly. She jumped up, and Christina followed.

They traversed the greater part of the little-used high road in silence and without meeting any one until they rounded a sharp bend, when, behold——!

There, on the edge of the moor, reclined the junior purser—and not alone. Beside him sat a dainty damsel of some eighteen summers, a vistor to Kilmabeg, into whose pretty mouth he was, at the moment, engaged in popping pink aromatic lozenges. His left arm was about her waist.

An inarticulate sound came from Christina; for an instant she halted as though to turn and flee. But she took her cue from Jessie Ann, and the two girls marched past the pair with burning cheeks and elevated noses. To Christina it was like a bad dream.

Jessie Ann was the first to speak.

"That was why I took ye up the high road," she said, with something like an effort.

Christina gaped at her friend.

"Of course I kent fine he was mashin' her," pursued Jessie Ann.

Christina gaped a little more widely if anything.

"She's been tryin' for to catch him since she

cam' here at the beginnin' o' the month. It's awfu' funny—eh, Teeny?" And Jessie Ann laughed loudly.

To oblige her friend the younger girl forced a dismal cackle.

"Catch me dressin' up an' runnin' efter a man!" said the elder, and shortly afterwards changed the subject by asking Christina if she liked pancakes with jam.

Later Miss Purvis and her niece went, as was their custom, to evening service. In the course of his sermon the minister put the question, "What is Truth?"

Christina wondered—with special reference to Love. She fell asleep that night, still wondering.

XIII

THE MAGIC POTION

"AUNTIE, what's a poti-on?"

It was nearly bed-time, and for the last hour Miss Purvis and her niece had been sewing in silence. Perhaps Miss Purvis had been drowsing, perhaps dreaming, over her seam; at all events she started at the question.

"What did you say, my dear?"

"I'm askin' ye, what's a poti-on?"

"I'm sure I never heard of such a thing, Christina," said Miss Purvis, looking blank.

"Is it something you have been reading about?"

"Uh-ha."

"Christina, I do wish you would not use that ugly word."

"'Mphm, then," said Christina.

"Can't you say *yes?*"

"Ay—I mean yes. But what's a poti-on?"

"Can you spell it?"

"P-O-T-I-O-N."

"Oh, you mean *potion.*"

"I thocht it was poti-on," said Christina, somewhat annoyed. "Weel, what's a potion, as ye ca' it?"

"Suppose you look it up in the dictionary," Miss Purvis returned pleasantly.

"D'ye no' ken?"

"Oh yes; I know quite well what the word potion means, Christina; but it will help you to remember if you see the meaning in print."

"Oh, Jamaica!" muttered Christina, getting up and going to the bookshelf. "What's the use o' footerin' aboot a stupit auld dictionary? I say, auntie," she went on, with a twinkle in her eyes, "*you* tell me the meanin', an' I'll see if ye're correc'. Eh?"

Miss Purvis smilingly shook her head. "I have tried that way before, Christina, and you have always said you would take my word for it. Look it up, my dear."

Christina took down a little pocket dictionary and came back to her seat.

"This book's daft," she presently declared. "It says a potion's a draught or a liquid meddicine. Hoo can a thing that gi'es ye a cold be——"

"A draught, in this case, is another name for a drink," explained the spinster. "So now you have learned two new words, which shows you the great advantage of referring to——"

"An' can a potion be naethin' else but a drink an' a meddicine?"

"Not that I know of. Where did you read about it, Christina?"

"In the *Sunday Companion*," the girl replied, after some hesitation. "It was a magic

potion," she continued slowly, without looking at her aunt. "A lass got it frae a—a sosserer to gi'e to a young man that wasna heedin' aboot her. She gi'ed it to him, an' it charmed him, an' afore she could say 'Jack Robinson' he was coortin' her like fun, an' their nuptails was celebrated in—— What's a nuptail, auntie?"

"I am surprised that the *Sunday Companion* should print such rubbish," said Miss Purvis.

"Maybe it was in anither paper. But——"

"No matter. It is sheer nonsense, and I wish you would read something sensible, Christina. There are no such things as magic potions, or sorcerers, or——"

"But there's sich things as nuptails, because I've seen it printit in the newspapers. What's a——"

"Hush, Christina! It is bed-time."

"But——"

"No! Put these foolish ideas out of your head and take off your boots."

"Hooch, ay!" sighed Christina resignedly. But she was not convinced by her aunt's denial of the existence of sorcery.

It was now the month of August, yet nothing had happened between Mr. Baldwin and Miss Purvis, though Mr. Baldwin on his last two calls had given Christina more cause for hope than ever he had done before. On both occasions he had lost the five o'clock steamer—

purposely, she felt sure—and waited till the six o'clock one, which ran only in the summer. On his last call he had brought Miss Purvis a beautiful cake, covered all over with icing and pink and white sugar, and as he presented it he had grown quite red. But alas! Miss Purvis seemed to have grown colder and colder, and had received the cake without getting the least excited, and had even told Mr. Baldwin that it was foolish of him to have lost the five o'clock steamer when the later one was such a slow one.

Altogether Christina was feeling extremely dissatisfied, and was ardently wishing herself living in the days when magic potions, whatever they might have been, were obtainable—for ladies as well as for gentlemen.

It happened that the Thursday following the foregoing conversation was the monthly half-holiday for the shop-keepers of Kilmabeg and the neighbouring villages. Miss Purvis did not, as a rule, recognize such half-holidays, but on this occasion she closed the shop at two o'clock; and half-an-hour later she and Christina took a steamer to the little town across the firth. Miss Purvis, after several years of hesitation, had decided to buy herself a new "best" dress.

Her niece had rejoiced at the decision, but her rejoicings had been cut short by Miss Purvis, who informed her that on no account would

she permit her to be present at the choosing of the dress.

"No, my dear; it is no use your asking. I shall never forget what I suffered when you *helped* me to buy a hat——"

"But I knocked doon the price for ye, auntie."

"I could never enter that shop again. Say no more about it. You can amuse yourself looking at the other shops while I am engaged with the dressmaker."

And Christina pled in vain. She was not without comfort, however. At this time she was the possessor of a shilling, which she had earned by assisting the doctor's wife during a brief indisposition of the latter's maid.

On the steamer she announced her intention of "bursting" the said shilling that very afternoon.

"I'm on for a reg'lar jamboree," she added.

For three minutes Miss Purvis spoke seriously, first on the vulgarity of slang, then on the folly of extravagance.

"Hooch, ay!" said Christina. After a short pause she casually observed—

"It's a guid thing Baldyin's comin' the morn an' no' the day. It wud be a rare suck for him to come an' find the shop shut. Eh, auntie?"

"Really, Christina!" cried Miss Purvis, indignantly.

"He wud think ye had done a bunk."

"May I ask what you mean by a *bunk*, Christina?"

"A slope. My! but ye ken awfu' few words, auntie!"

Miss Purvis groaned and turned away.

"Are ye feelin' seeck, auntie?" Christina inquired in a sympathetic voice. "Try workin' yer mooth as if ye was eatin' meat. I read that that was guid for the sea-seeckness. Never heed what the folk think. Turn yer face to the watter, an' they'll no' see ye. Noo, try to imagine ye're eatin' something tough-like, an' chow it for a' ye're worth——"

"Christina, if you say another word——"

"Oh, mercy!" Christina exclaimed, jumping up. "Thonder a boy in the water!"

"Oh, dear!" Miss Purvis jumped up also, while several passengers stared in alarm. "Where, where?"

"Thonder—tied to thon yacht," said Christina, with a calm smile. "I didna think ye was sae easy catched, auntie. I'll awa' to the neb o' the boat. See ye later. So-long!"

Miss Purvis collapsed. She *was* feeling just a little seedy, as she usually did on steamers.

Christina greatly enjoyed looking at the shops without supervision or restriction. She had made up her mind to purchase a gift for her aunt, whose birthday fell about a month later, yet though she saw many things suitable, she could not decide on any one of them.

Having inspected every likely window in the main street, she turned into a side street. But finding there no shops of the kind desired, she was about to retrace her steps, when she was arrested by the sight of a wig on a waxen scalp in a barber's little window.

"Oh, Jamaica! what a funny thing!" she said to herself, gazing at it. Presently her eyes began to wander about the window, the contents of which were deplorably stale and dusty. They looked as if they had not been touched for years, which was probably the case.

All at once Christina gave a little jump and drew in her breath. Then her gaze became glued to some object in the left-hand corner of the window. The colour rushed to her face and faded again. Could it—*could* it be true, after all?

Five minutes later, clutching her shilling, she entered the shop.

A gaunt elderly man, with fearsome black moustachios and a sad squint, bounced up from behind the counter. At the sight of him Christina could scarce keep from flight; yet she had expected to see a rather a terrifying person.

"Well, miss?" The voice was soft and polite—the voice of one who had known better days—but it made Christina shudder.

She moistened her lips and, in a tremulous whisper, said—

"I want a—a potion."

"A lotion, miss?"

"A potion."

"A lotion—for the hair?" He smiled dreadfully—so it seemed to Christina. Once more she all but fled.

"A potion," she whispered bravely. "What—what's the price o' yer—yer Spirit o' Love?"

The man looked puzzled, but now Christina was sure that he was pretending. He could not, or would not, look her in the face. He was trying her, doubtless.

"It's in the window," she said.

"Oh!" Again he smiled, but this time it was a smile of understanding. With fingers which, the girl fancied, trembled he unfastened the frosted glass door opening on the window. A moment later he was brushing a cobweb from a small bottle containing a yellowish liquid. A soiled and faded label of floral design was affixed to the bottle, and on it appeared, as in letters of fire, the words, "Spirit of Love."

"Spirit of Love!" murmured the barber, with one eye on the bottle and the other on Christina. "One shilling, miss."

A faint sigh escaped the girl, but only a faint one. It would take all her shilling, but it was worth it.

"Hoo much should a lady tak'?" she asked diffidently, pointing at the bottle.

"Oh, just a few drops, miss," the barber replied, becoming grave with an effort. "It is a very strong extract. Perhaps you would

like to smell it." He withdrew the glass stopper and presented the bottle.

Christina smelt cautiously. "Is it jist scent?" she cried, looking doubtful.

"It is a most *charming* scent," he replied, with another dreadful but reassuring smile. "The very latest, prepared from a secret receipt."

"Oh! Would it—charm a lady?"

"Certainly! I have sold hundreds of bottles of 'Spirit of Love' to gentlemen for that very object, miss," he said, fondling the phial which he had had in stock for twelve long and weary years. "Charms them like magic!" he added.

"Like magic?"

"Like nothing else, miss."

"An' it wudna hurt her?"

The barber stared. "Hurt her? Certainly not!" he said at last. "It will only charm and refresh. A few drops on the handkerchief will be found wonderfully invigorating. Ah! now I think I see what you meant when you asked about its hurting! Do you wish the bottle for a sick friend? Just so! In that case a few drops on the pillow will prove a real charm."

Christina nearly dropped. It was too wonderful! A sick friend! How could this terrible man know that her aunt had been feeling sick on the steamer?

He *must* be a *Sosserer!*

Speechless, she laid her shilling on the coun-

ter. It seemed an age till the barber handed her the small parcel with a polite "Thank you, miss."

Clutching it, she fled from the dread presence.

So subdued and silent was she for the rest of the day that Miss Purvis became alarmed, and insisted on her taking some particularly nasty physic before retiring for the night.

It was two o'clock in the morning. A high wind was wailing round the humble dwelling. Christina, wide-awake, shivered.

She had intended to perform the magic spell at midnight, but her aunt had been very restless in her sleep. Now, at last, a steady, gentle snore told the girl that her opportunity had come.

Cautiously Christina drew from under her pillow the phial of "Spirit of Love." Carefully she withdrew the stopper, and, holding her finger on the orifice, prepared to let the drops fall on her aunt's pillow. Several times she hesitated, but at last her courage prevailed. Mr. Baldwin was coming on the morrow. Her aunt *must* be charmed.

She poised the bottle over the pillow, at a safe distance from the sleeper's head. She would let fall seven drops, which she had read somewhere was the perfect number. Now!

One! Two! Three! Four!—*Oh!*

The sudden squall of a cat rent the air.

When Christina recovered her wits the bottle was empty.

Miss Purvis started up.

"Oh, heavens! what is that *abominable* smell?"

Christina sobbed bitterly, yet thankfully. She was glad she had not killed her aunt. But she gave no explanations beyond exhibiting the empty bottle, which Miss Purvis, after lighting a candle, threw into the fireplace with the remark "Spirit of Fiddlesticks!" Whereupon Christina sobbed more bitterly than ever.

Miss Purvis in desperation opened the window, and the chill blast played briskly on the scent-saturated bed for the rest of that wretched, wretched night.

In the morning Miss Purvis had a splitting headache, induced by the reeking perfume, and a painfully stiff neck, caused by the draught from the window.

And Mr. Baldwin—a note informed Miss Purvis—had a wedding to attend in Glasgow and would not call for another week.

And Christina had a broken heart—almost.

XIV

THE COMPACT

"LISTEN to this, auntie!"

Miss Purvis was engaged in opening a parcel of periodicals, which had arrived by the evening steamer and which Christina had just fetched from the pier.

"Listen to this, auntie!"

"I am listening."

Christina proceeded to read from a mustard-coloured handbill the following—

Grand Moonlight Cruise to Rothesay Bay, by the North British Coy.'s Steamer Marmion, *on Friday evening, 23rd August (weather permitting). Steamer leaves Kilmabeg at 7.20, returning about 10 p.m. Music on board. Fare—one shilling.*

She paused impressively.

"Indeed," said Miss Purvis absently.

"What price a moonlight cruise, auntie?" Christina's excitement was ill-suppressed.

"Didn't you say it was one shilling?" the spinster returned, beginning to count the items in the parcel.

"Tits! . . . Are ye on for a moonlight

cruise, auntie? My, it wud be rare fun? Eh?"

"There is a *Boudoir Companion* short here," murmured Miss Purvis, "and a *Christian Dispatch* too many."

"What's the odds? I'm askin' ye if ye're on for a moonlight cruise on Friday."

"Oh yes, of course—I mean no, certainly not," said Miss Purvis, who happened to have a headache. "I do not think such a cruise would be very nice, Christina."

"Ha'e ye ever been a moonlight cruise?"

"Not since I was very young."

"Aboot ma age, eh?"

"Oh no; not quite so young as you, my dear."

"It strikes me," Christina observed gloomily, "that I'll never be the richt age for enjeyin' masel'. I'm ower young the noo; an' when I'm no' ower young, I'll be ower auld. Oh, what a life!"

"Hush, Christina! You are talking nonsense. There's a time for everything." The spinster passed her hand over her forehead and sighed wearily.

The girl looked at her.

"Ha'e ye a sair heid, auntie?"

"I'm afraid I have, dear."

"That's a peety." Christina's tone was quite sympathetic, even when she added, "I suppose it was the crab ye had to yer supper last nicht that done it. Ye're aye upset efter

ye've ett a crab. I ken ye're passionately fond o' crabs, but ye should learn to say 'No,' auntie. Is yer heid awfu' bad?"

"No; it is not really very bad. I dare say it will pass off after tea."

"I'll mak' the tea the noo," Christina said briskly.

"That would be very nice," her aunt responded with a grateful smile. "You are a kind, thoughtful girl, Christina."

"Hooch, ay! Jist you sit quate an' never heed yer *Boodwar Companions* an' *Dispatches* the noo. Wud ye like a dose o' meddicine—eh? No? Aweel, jist as ye please. It's for you to say. . . . I'll ha'e the tea ready in twa shakes. Ye better no' tak' hot toast the nicht—dry toast'll suit ye better. Noo, dinna stir till I cry on ye."

With the utmost enthusiasm Christina set about preparing the meal. She regretted her aunt's suffering, but she did enjoy taking charge. Having put the kettle on the fire, she proceeded to lay the table, singing as she did so—

"Oh, come along an' get yer hair cut!
I'll shave ye while ye wait;
I'll scrape the skin that grows on yer chin,
An' leave it as smooth as a plate!
For we're a' T. T., frae the boss—that's me—
To the boy that pits on the soap.
So have no fear o' losin' yer ear
At M'Murtrie's barber's shops—
Ta-ra-ra!"

She repeated the verse several times in a moderately soft voice, but thereafter her singing grew louder and louder till—

"Christina!" called her aunt.

"Hullo!" she replied, going to the door.

"Do not sing that dreadful song, please."

"Did it hurt yer heid, auntie?"

"No; but Mrs. MacBean, who was in the shop a moment ago, was perfectly shocked."

"She's easy shocked. What was she buyin'?"

"Mrs. MacBean was collecting for the Foreign Missions."

"Oh, weel, I hope she didna collect onything aff you! I wudna gi'e her a maik—the auld goat-faced kangaroo!"

"Christina!"

"Aw, I forgot aboot yer heid, auntie. I'm sorry. The tea'll be ready in a jiffy. Oh, mercy! there the kettle bilin' ower!" And Christina fled back to her duty.

An hour later Miss Purvis admitted that the tea had done her a world of good, and by eight o'clock, when business was over, she expressed herself as quite better.

Happening to raise her eyes above the mantelpiece, she caught sight of the yellow handbill, which Christina had pinned to the oleograph of "The Stag at Bay."

"I do not think that is an ornament, my dear," she mildly remarked.

"I didna mean it for an ornament. I stuck

it up so we wudna forget the moonlight cruise on Friday, auntie."

"But, my dear girl——"

"You an' me's gaun to ha'e an' awfu' skite, eh, auntie?"

"Nonsense, Christina! I would never think of going to such a thing."

"I suppose I'll ha'e to gang masel'," said Christina carelessly.

"Certainly not!"

"But I've decidet to gang. I've nae money, but I'll gang as a stowaway."

Miss Purvis held her peace.

"Come on, auntie, say ye'll gang. 'T wud be an awfu' disgrace to you if I was catched bein' a stowaway, an——"

"Do not say *catched,* Christina."

"Nabbit, then. It wud be an awfu' disgrace, wud it no'? But I ken ye'll come. I'll promise to behave masel', auntie, an' ye'll enjey it fine—if ye're carefu' what ye eat afore ye start. It'll remind ye o' yer young days, eh?"

"I never heard of such an idea!" said Miss Purvis. "What makes you want to go?"

"Oh, weel, near everybody in Kilmabeg has been to moonlight cruises except us. An' Friday's the last this year."

"Well, perhaps, next year——"

"Some time, never!" groaned Christina. "That's the wey folk miss their chances. We'll maybe no' be leevin' next year."

"Hush!" Miss Purvis spoke reprovingly. "This is only Monday. I must think over it."

"It wud save ye a heap o' thinkin', auntie, if ye decided noo."

"You must not be impertinent, Christina."

"It was jist the truth. I didna mean for to be impiddent. D'ye think ye'll ha'e made up yer mind by the morn's nicht, auntie?"

"It is impossible to say."

Christina heaved a sigh and relapsed into silence. Miss Purvis knitted steadily.

At the end of ten minutes Christina rose, went into the shop, and returned with a gaudily covered novelette.

Wife or No Wife was the title, and she repeated it aloud.

"I forbid you to read that," said her aunt.

"What wey?"

"Because you are too young."

"What *am* I to read?"

Miss Purvis reflected. At last she said, in her primmest voice, "I have been thinking lately that it would be very pleasant if you were to read something aloud to me every evening, my dear."

"Richt ye are!" said Christina, opening the novelette.

"No; not that kind of reading. I mean *good* reading. Now, if you go to the shelf, you will find a little book—a little green book—called *Gems of Poesie*. You might bring it to me."

Christina rose without much eagerness, and brought her aunt the volume mentioned.

"I got this as a prize when I was at school, Christina."

"It's no' much o' a prize; what did ye get it for? Punctuality, eh?"

"For good conduct, Christina."

"Come on, noo! Ye're tryin to cod me!"

"To what?"

"Och, never heed. I beg yer paurdon. I see 'for good conduct' on the front page, richt enough. Is't poetry?"

"The finest of poetry. That is why it is called *Gems of Poesie*. Now, what will you read to me?"

"You read first, auntie," said Christina, backing away.

"Certainly," said Miss Purvis agreeably. She turned over the pages. "Ah! here is a beautiful poem. Sit down, Christina, and pay great attention."

Christina sat down and began to whistle softly.

"Hush! Listen to this beautiful poem. It is by William Wordsworth. It is called 'We are Seven.'" Miss Purvis emitted several delicate coughs.

"Did ye say seven or seventy, auntie?" inquired her niece.

"Seven, Christina. 'We are Seven.' Now attend!—

"I met a little cottage girl:
She was eight years old, she said—"

"Och, I ken that!" Christina interrupted. "It was in ma last year's reader. I ken it fine."

"Then, perhaps, since you know it so well," said Miss Purvis, somewhat snappily, "you can tell me what comes after the two lines I have just read."

"Hooch, ay!—

"I met a little cottage girl:
She was eight years old, she said;
She took her little porringer
An' stuck it on her head!"

And Christina laughed heartily.

"Christina!" gasped her aunt. "I'm surprised at you!"

"That was the wey yin o' the lassies used to say it. Is there nae love-poetry in that prize o' yours?"

Miss Purvis ignored the inquiry. "If you are going to make mock of these beautiful verses, I shall not read another line."

"Oh, read anither, please, auntie."

After some hesitation the spinster began—

"Oft have I heard of Lucy Gray—"

"Same here," said Christina. "But fire awa'."

Miss Purvis shut the book, laid it aside, and resumed her knitting.

A minute went slowly past.

"Auntie!"

"Yes?" very coldly.

"Auntie!"

"What is it?"

"I—I didna mean to offend ye. Gi'e's anither chance. I couldna help kennin' aboot the little cottage girl an' Miss Gray. They were baith in ma lesson book. Read anither, if ye please, auntie. I'll haud ma tongue this time."

Miss Purvis relaxed from the stiff attitude she had assumed.

"Well, Christina, if you will promise not to interrupt, I might read you 'Lord Ullin's Daughter.' It is by Thomas Campbell——"

"That's the name o' the sclater in Kilmabeg."

"Never mind that. 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' is an exceedingly fine poem."

"Was she young or auld?"

"She was young——"

"As young as me?"

"Oh no; she was a young lady who ran away with her lover——"

"Her *lover!* Oh, my! Please read it, auntie," cried Christina, and, curling one leg round the other, settled herself to listen.

Miss Purvis read the whole tale without suffering a single interruption, and at its conclusion her niece was pleased to say—

"That's a champion pome, auntie. I like it

rale weel. But what a peety they got droondit, an' what an auld besom the fayther was! I wish ye wud read it again. Please, auntie."

Miss Purvis was frankly delighted.

"Now, I'm sure that such a poem is far more worth reading than trashy novels, my dear. How would you like to learn 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' by heart?"

Christina smiled doubtfully.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," cried Miss Purvis, with a sudden inspiration. "If you can repeat the poem correctly to me by Thursday night, I'll take you to the moonlight cruise on Friday—provided that the weather is very fine. Now, what do you say to that?"

The girl jumped up. "I'm on!" she shouted, and fell upon her aunt's neck.

She spent the rest of the evening in studying "Lord Ullin's Daughte. ' and went to bed in a fever of anticipation.

About 3 a.m. Miss Purvis was roused from her slumbers.

"Auntie! Auntie!"

"What is it? Don't you feel well?" Miss Purvis sniffed violently, and was relieved at the absence of perfume.

"D'ye think it'll be fine on Friday?"

"Friday? Oh yes—yes, I hope it will be fine. Go to sleep, dear."

"I'm thinkin' it'll be a queer suck for me if Friday's wat. I canna *un*learn the pome."

XV

THE MOONLIGHT CRUISE

"MY! what a lovely evenin'! The baker was oot o' sweet-mulk scones, so I had to tak' cookies instead. But they're jist new oot the oven, so ye better no' eat ony till efter the moonlight cruise, auntie."

Christina laid her purchase on the counter, and again remarked on the loveliness of the evening.

"I hope it is not going to rain," Miss Purvis returned. "Dear me! These cookies are quite warm! They would be delicious toasted and buttered——"

"Efter the moonlight cruise," said Christina firmly.

"Really, Christina!" protested the spinster, who doted on hot buttered cookies.

"It's for yer ain guid, auntie. Ye needna flee up as if I had bit yer nose off."

"What a horrible expression to use! I shall certainly not allow you to tell me what I should, or should not, eat. For the last three days you have been most rude, watching every bite I put in my mouth. What do you mean by it?" Miss Purvis spoke indignantly.

Christina regarded her more with sorrow than anger. "Eat yer cookies," she said at last, in a tone of utter despair, "eat yer cookies! But remember—remember I warned ye!" She turned and went slowly towards the living-room.

"Christina!"

"I hear ye."

"Come back here!"

Christina came slowly back.

Miss Purvis put on her glasses, and they slipped off and landed on the floor.

"I'll get them for ye," said Christina briskly, coming round the counter.

"No, thank you," said Miss Purvis haughtily. She stooped, recovered her glasses, rose, and bumped her head against the edge of the counter.

"Did ye hurt yersel', auntie?"

"Certainly not!" said Miss Purvis, her eyes [illegible] tears. She turned her back on her

Are ye offendit?" Christina asked anxiously.

Miss Purvis produced her handkerchief and pretended to blow her nose.

"Ye've hurt yersel'!" cried Christina, with concern in her voice. "Here, auntie, till I feel if ye've raised a lump. It was a queer dunt ye gi'ed yer heid. Was it yer broo? Wull I get ye a bit butter?"

"I wish you would go away!"

"Och, auntie!"

"Go away this minute!"

At this point a customer entered the shop.

Christina sighed and retired, taking the bag of cookies with her.

"Thank heaven, the wound isna mortal," she said to herself, quoting from a recent novelette. "I didna mean to offend her—I'll mak' the tea, an' that'll maybe cheer her up."

Twenty minutes later a delicious odour stole into the shop.

"Christina! what *are* you doing?" cried the spinster, after a long, luxurious sniff.

"Tea's ready, auntie."

"Tea?"

"Ay! T-E-A, *tea!*"

Miss Purvis, trying to frown, entered the living-room.

"Christina! What is this?"

"These," replied Christina, bringing from the oven a covered dish, "these is cookies!"

"*Are* cookies, my dear."

"They'll soon be *was* cookies," remarked Christina, with a happy giggle. "Sit doon, auntie! Dinna be bashfu'! Enjey yersel' while ye're young! *'A chieftain, to the Highlands bound, cries, Boatman, do not tarry! an' I'll give thee a'*—Tak' care an' no' burn yersel'. They're pipin' hot, auntie—*'a silver pound to row us o'er the ferry!'* I can say it fine—eh, auntie?"

"You're an extraordinary girl, Christina,"

said M'ss Purvis, laughing in spite of herself. "Am I really to be permitted to eat a cookie?"

"If ye behave yersel', ye'll maybe get twa! My! it's a lovely evenin' for a moonlight cruise! I never seen the sea sae calm."

"That is delightful," remarked Miss Purvis, raising a cookie to her mouth.

"Haud on, auntie! Ye forgot to ask a blessin'."

"So I did, my dear. But, really, you confuse me so."

Miss Purvis said grace, and the meal proceeded, Christina enlivening it with snatches from "Lord Ullin's Daughter," till her aunt devoutly wished, in secret, that the poem had never been penned.

"Hooch, ay! It's a champion pome!" the girl observed when the hot plate was empty. "It's a bit sad, but I suppose it's better to ha'e loved an' lost than never to ha'e loved at all. An' if *we* get droondit at the moonlight cruise, it'll be nice to think we ett the cookies, an' didna leave them to wur ancestors. Is it no' time we was gettin' dressed, auntie? I see ye've done yer hair in advance, so it'll no' tak' ye long to tosh yersel' up. Come on, an' we'll wash the dishes, an' then I'll mind the shope till ye perform yer toilet. Hoo's yer nut?"

"My nut?"

"I meant to say yer heid, auntie."

"Oh! Christina, Christina! will you never——"

"Aw, dinna be vexed, auntie," said Christina apologetically. "I'll learn the richt words some day. This is the nicht o' the moonlight cruise! What price a life on the ocean wave? Come on, auntie. I'll wash, an' you'll dry. Pass the plates. Oh, mercy! there a customer! Haste ye, auntie, an' dinna gossip —for less nor a shillin'. I'll manage the dishes masel'. *'One lovely arm was streetched for aid, an' one was round her lover'*—— Oh, mercy! I've chipped it!"

Thanks to Christina they were on the pier about half-an-hour too early.

"Never heed. It's a lovely evenin'," she remarked cheerfully. "I wonder at ye bringin' yer waterproof an' bumberstick, auntie!"

"You ought to have brought your own waterproof when I told you, Christina. Look at the clouds."

"That's heat."

"Heat!" cried Miss Purvis, with a little shiver.

"Are ye cauld, auntie? Come on, an' I'll race ye up the pier an' back! Are ye on?"

"Certainly not!"

"Weel, what wud ye like to dae to pass the time? Wud ye like me to recite 'Lord Ullin's Daughter'—eh?"

"Ye—es," said the spinster, making her choice of two evils.

So Christina reeled off the poem—with, it must be confessed, more fluency than feeling.

"You have certainly got it by heart," her aunt observed, smiling faintly.

"What price an encore?" asked Christina, looking gratified.

"I do wish you would not use that stupid expression, my dear. It irritates me."

"Does it? Weel, I'll no' say it again. I—I hope ye're feelin' a' richt, auntie."

"I never felt better; but I do find it chilly."

"Jist you thole till ye get on the boat, an' then ye'll soon be warm. I hear there's gaun to be dancin' to the music on board. I'll get the postman—he's gaun the cruise—to gi'e ye a polka. What price a—I mean to say——"

"Christina!" exclaimed the horrified Miss Purvis, "you promised me you would behave, if I took you this cruise. If you are going to affront me——"

Christina squeezed her aunt's arm. "I was jist jokin', auntie. I ken fine ye're no' a dancer. I'll no' affront ye."

A goodly number of people were waiting on the pier, when at last the *Marmion,* already well laden, came alongside.

"My! what a crood! I doot we'll ha'e to sit on wur thumbs," said Christina. "Haud on to me, an' I'll help ye to win through, auntie."

She espied a single vacant seat near the band, dragged her aunt to it, and pushed her upon it with a laugh of triumph.

"It's lucky for you ye've got me," she said.

"Thank you, Christina," said Miss Purvis, panting. "But where are you going to sit?"

"Aw, I'll jist ha'e a bit stroll in the meantime. So-long! See an' enjey yersel'."

"Christina, you must not leave me!"

"Are ye feelin' bad already, auntie?"

"You must stay beside me, and behave."

Christina looked rebellious. She wanted very much to rove about the deck among the throng which, she hopefully suspected, consisted largely of lovers. The band was playing for all it was worth—or, at any rate, for all it hoped to be worth by the end of the voyage—and every moment the music made her feel more reckless and restless. She gazed about her in the hope of discovering a friend, but all the Kilmabeg girls on board were her seniors by years. There was no one for whose company she might excusably leave her aunt's.

"Oh, I wish auntie had a mash," she sighed to herself. "I wish Baldyin was here."

"You may sit on my knee for a little, my dear," Miss Purvis said kindly.

Christina quivered, but pretended not to hear.

But just then—oh, joy!—the Kilmabeg baker's eldest daughter came up and spoke to Miss Purvis.

Christina hesitated, and was lost—in the crowd. For an hour she forgot everything in her quest for romance, and traversed the deck

from bow to stern, from stern to bow, peering through the gathering darkness at all persons who happened to be sitting or standing in pairs. So anxiously did she peer, that at last an elderly gentleman, whom she had passed several times, stopped her and inquired in fatherly tones if she had lost her friends. Christina was so annoyed that she nearly made a rude reply, but restrained herself in time, and with a toss of her head and a muttered negative, left the elderly gentleman to "mind his ain business," as she expressed it to herself.

The moon, which had hitherto been obscured, now shone through the clouds, and Christina caught sight of a young man and a young woman seated very close together in the lee of the funnel, the former talking with the most intense earnestness.

Her heart leapt. "A proposal!" she murmured, and, quite unable to resist the temptation, she edged gradually towards the pair. All things, as far as she had gathered from her reading, were now in keeping with a proposal—the moonlight, the calm sea, the music. It took her fully ten minutes to venture near enough to hear the "passionate vowels" which she imagined to be pouring from the lips of the "adorin' swine."

"Yes," the young man was saying, "after a hard day's golf, a good, juicy steak, with chips and a bottle of stout, is hard to beat!"

And as Christina stood gazing in dazed and horror-stricken amazement at the speaker she felt her arm gripped gently.

"Christina! where have you been all this time? I've been searching everywhere for you."

Christina started violently.

"Hooch, ay!" she said, recovering herself, and allowing herself to be led away, while she accepted her aunt's mild lecture without uttering a word.

"Now, my dear," said Miss Purvis, after a pause, "I don't want to spoil your pleasure, but I think you might stay beside me for the rest of the cruise, and——"

"Are ye feelin' bad, auntie?"

"I never felt better," said Miss Purvis with pride and satisfaction. "I believe I could get to like a sea-faring life in time. And d'you know what Miss Brown was telling me?" Miss Brown was the baker's eldest daughter. "Guess what she told me, Christina!"

Christina looked blank. "What?" she inquired.

"Oh, you must try to guess," said Miss Purvis, all smiles. "It's a great event."

"Oh, I ken," returned the girl. "A cookie burst an' killed twa currants!"

"Christina!"

"Weel, what was the event aboot Miss Broon?"

Miss Purvis lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Miss Brown is engaged to be married! Her *fiancé*——"

"Her what?"

"Her betrothed, then, is on board—such a nice young fellow, so gentlemanly, so——"

"Ye're no' coddin' me, auntie?"

"My dear child!"

"Weel, whaur are they—if it's true!"

"They have seats just beside where I was sitting, and they are keeping my seat for me. Come, Christina."

Christina went with her aunt, and for the remainder of the cruise her cup of bliss ran over. In happy silence she sat on three inches of seat, watching stealthily the really and truly engaged couple. Her eyes observed every hand-squeeze; her ears heard every murmured "dear"; her mind imagined romantic incidents of the wooing which had had such a delightful conclusion. It was not until the very end—when the *Marmion* was once more at Kilmabeg pier—that her young heart suffered a pang of sadness.

If only her aunt would look as happy as Miss Brown! If only her aunt were engaged, too!

All the way home Christina felt that she would do *anything* to please and brighten and cheer her aunt.

"Dear auntie," she suddenly exclaimed, when, a little later, she observed Miss Purvis gazing rather dejectedly, as she thought, at the

kettle which was slow in boiling, "dear auntie, wull I recite ye 'Lord Ullin's Daughter'?"

And Miss Purvis rubbed her sleepy eyes, checked a groan, smiled vaguely, and said very kindly—

"Yes, if you please, my dear."

XVI

MISS PURVIS'S ROMANCE

ON an afternoon towards the end of September Christina bounced into the shop, then stopped short, regarding her aunt with staring eyes and open mouth.

"What's up?" she gasped, dropping her school books on the floor.

Her aunt frowned, but a moment later forced a smile.

"You are home early to-day, Christina."

"Uh-ha. The teacher's got a gum-bile. Awfu' lucky. Eh?"

After delivering a brief lecture on respect for one's elders and those in authority, Miss Purvis said pleasantly—

"I see you are looking at my new dress. I hope you like it, Christina."

"Oh, it's fair gorgeous! But what wey——"

"Not *gorgeous*, I trust," said Miss Purvis, laughing uneasily.

"Weel, it's awfu' stylish, auntie. The trimmin's fair faskinatin'. Did it jist come the day?"

"Yes; I am glad you like it, my dear. Now put away your books——"

Christina kicked them into a corner.

"Not that way, Christina. When will you ever learn to respect and take care of your books?"

"Dear knows," said Christina, recovering the bag and slinging it through the half-open door of the living room.

Miss Purvis shook her head, but her niece took no notice and came round the counter to examine the new dress at close quarters.

"Ye've nae beads on it," she remarked presently.

"Beads?"

"Ay, beads. But maybe ye're no' auld enough for beads. I like the sleeves, though, an' the neck, an' the waist. My! ye're awfu' jimp aboot the waist, auntie! I doot ye've been tight-lacin' like the fashionable debewtanties——"

"Hush, Christina!"

"I was readin' aboot a young lady that tight-laced till she grew three inches taller—"

"*Hush!* You must not talk of such things."

"Hooch, ay! Dinna excite! Yer hair's awfu' nice the day. That's a new style ye've got for it. If it was a wee thing puffier, ye wud be like a Gibson girl. Are ye wearin' a pad?"

"Really, Christina, I cannot listen to such talk! Pad, indeed!"

"Nae offence. Pads is a' the go noo-a-days. They're wore in the highest society—patronized wi' Royalty. But what's up?"

"Up, Christina?" Miss Purvis looked at her little silver watch.

"Ay! Are ye expectin' onybody to tea the nicht?"

"No; I am not expecting anybody—to tea, Christina," slowly replied Miss Purvis, avoiding her niece's gaze. "What a beautiful afternoon it is," she added hastily. "Are you not going a walk this afternoon, Christina? The fine weather will soon be over, and you ought to take advantage of it. Really, you ought."

Christina eyed her aunt steadily, but said nothing.

"I don't know when I saw such a beautiful afternoon," the spinster continued nervously. "It is really remarkable for the time of year. It is almost a sin to waste it indoors. It is indeed! Wouldn't you like to ask Jessie Ann to go a walk with you? I'm sure it would be delightful up the loch this afternoon, and——"

"*You* can gang oot an' gi'e the folk a treat, auntie, an' I'll keep the shope till ye come back—eh? Are ye on?"

"I'm afraid I cannot do that. I—I have some accounts to make up." Miss Purvis suddenly fell to hunting among the papers in her desk.

"I'll help ye."

"Thank you, my dear; but it would be much better for you out-of-doors. And—a—you might call at the baker's and get some nice cakes—what you like best—for tea."

Christina regarded the top of her aunt's head with profound suspicion for nearly a minute. Then she said—

"It's ower warm for walkin'. I'll jist gang an' sit on the pier till the boat comes in."

Miss Purvis suppressed a groan. "Don't you think it would be much nicer up the loch?" she said feebly.

"Na," Christina returned firmly, adding, "I think I'll pit on ma guid things."

A frantic rustling of papers was the only response.

"I'm sayin', auntie, I think I'll put on ma guid things."

"Don't be absurd, child!" said the spinster irritably. "Why should you put on your good clothes to-day?"

"To keep ye comp'ny. . . . Oh, thonder's the boat comin'!"

"How would you like," said Miss Purvis desperately, still rummaging in her desk, "how would you like to walk up the loch and inquire if poor old Mrs. M'Phedron is keeping any better? I'm sure she would be very glad to see you."

"I dare say she wud. Can I get the lend o' a pair o' curlin'-tongs, please?"

"Certainly not! What on earth do you want to dress yourself for, Christina?"

"Oh, jist for fun. . . . But ye micht lend us a pair o' tongs, auntie. I'll no spile

them, an' naebody'll ever ken they've been used." Christina edged towards the drawer where the stock of tongs was kept. "Ma hair's that leeky," she said mournfully. "Come on, auntie."

"Oh, well, take the tongs, Christina!" cried Miss Purvis weakly. "It is very wrong of me to allow you to encourage your vanity, but——"

"Dinna fash yersel' aboot that, auntie," said the girl, as she gleefully selected the coveted implements. "It's you that's the toff the day. My! ye're dressed to kill at a thoosan' yards! Thenk ye, auntie."

"Don't burn yourself," said Miss Purvis, with a furtive glance through the window.

"Nae fears! I hope ye'll no' find it awfu' dull till I appear again." So saying Christina retired to the back premises and, having shut herself therein, stuffed her handkerchief in her mouth and skipped round the table some twenty times.

"Oh, Jamaica!" she said to herself at last, as she inserted the curling-tongs between the ribs of the grate, "there's something up this time. I was sure it was Baldyin's writin' on the letter she got this mornin'. An' then she couldna eat her breakfast. An' noo she's a' dressed up, an' doesna seem to ken what she's daein', an' wants me to gang oot a walk. But I'm no' sae green as I'm cabbage lookin'. There's something up, or I'm a duchess!

. . . I've got it! He's comin' wi' the boat! That's why she didna want me to gang to the pier. An' it's no' his proper day for comin'. I wonder why he's comin' the day. . . . Oh, what if he was to propose! She's kin' o' temptin'-lookin' in her new things; but, oh! I hope she's no' jist triflin' an' flurtin' wi' him."

In these and many other reflections did Christina indulge during the next few minutes, while her aunt continued to burrow feverishly in the desk without any definite object whatsoever.

The door of the shop opened, and Miss Purvis let the lid of the desk fall with a loud bang. Christina, who was washing, put her soapy hand to her heart, gasping, "It's him! Oh, Jamaica!"

Then she heard a piping, childish voice say—

"Please, could ye oblige me wi' change for a penny?"

"What a suck!" muttered Christina, and resumed her ablutions.

But ere she had dried her face the hoped-for thing happened. Mr. Baldwin arrived. She heard him say, "Lovely day!" in his usual hearty tones, but immediately thereafter his voice seemed to sink to a mere whisper.

With the towel in her hands and her face still damp she crept to the door.

But she did not peep. Even as she touched

the curtain covering the glass she drew back.

"Honour among thieves is the best policy," she said to herself, and retired to the shabby easy-chair, wondering where she had read the motto. She found it impossible to go on dressing herself. She could only sit still—and wait—and try to imagine what was happening in the shop.

Doubtless she imagined many vain things, and it never occurred to her that for more than a year she herself had been standing in the way of the match between Mr. Baldwin and her aunt. And it would surely have broken her young heart had she known that Miss Purvis had been striving all those months to make her "a young lady," in order that Miss Purvis might at last say, "Yes," without compunction, to Mr. Baldwin's repeatedly written proposals of marriage.

Huddled in the easy-chair, Christina wondered which knee Mr. Baldwin would sink on; and then it struck her that, whatever knee he sank on, he would hardly be able to see Miss Purvis for the counter. It was rather depressing. Nearly all her heroes had proposed in conservatories, or sylvan dells, or on moonlit moors, or sea-beat shores. A few had proposed in haunted castles, steam yachts, and motor-cars. But not once had she read of a proposal in a shop. On the other hand, she had read that "Love will find a way," and a vision

of Mr. Baldwin, with one foot on a chair and one knee on the counter, did not strike her as the least funny.

Scarcely a sound reached her, and her ears almost ached with listening.

"I suppose the adorin' swine'll be whisperin' sweet nothin's," she said to herself. "I never heard Baldyin sae saft-spoken." She resisted another strong impulse to peep. "I hope she's no' ower coquettish wi' him. She should catch him when she gets the chance. Oh, my! I wish I kent what they was speakin' aboot."

At that moment Mr. Baldwin was saying—

"You might as well call me 'James.' And as for Christina, I hope she will some day call me 'Uncle James.' She needs an uncle as well as an aunt—in default of a father and mother. There is nothing wrong with the girl except her speech—she has a real, good heart, which is all you and I need to work on. We shall make a fine woman of Christina, you and I—Mary. Don't let her stand between us any longer; let her bring us together, my dear—ahem!"

It was then that Miss Purvis said, "James" for the first time, prefacing it with an "O" and at least three "J's."

And it was then, also, that Christina became sensible of the odour of burning wood, and realized that the handles of the red-hot curling-tongs were charred to cinders.

"If he doesna propose, I'm a waster," she

told herself when, with the aid of shovel and poker, she had conveyed the ruined tongs to the sink and heard them hiss their last under a cold douche. "An' I ha'ena even curled ma hair. Oh, me! I doot I'm no' Fortune's favourite."

Returning to the easy-chair, she twisted her legs together, interlocked her fingers, and longed for something to happen.

"He's got nae' samples wi' him," she thought, "or I wud ha'e heard the tin things rattlin'. That proves he's no' here on business. Oh, he *must* be proposin'. If it wasna a sacred performance, I wud ha'e a squint at them. I wonder if he's printin' burnin' kisses on her taper finger. . . . I doot I'll never ha'e taper fingers. . . . But I suppose I'll never ha'e an adorin' swine, nor get engaged, nor blight ma troth." She sighed heavily. "I never heard o' a hero-ine wi' leeky hair like mine. Oh, never! . . . But I wudna mind it as much if Baldyin was ma uncle.—I maun remember to ca' him Maister Bald*win*. If he was nuptailed to auntie I wud ca' him Uncle James. James is a nice front name. It's maybe no' as noble-like as Lionel an' Marmaduke, but, still, it's a nice name. . . . I wonder if auntie wud ha'e me for a bridesmaid. Oh, my! What fun! What gorgeousness! But I doot she thinks I'm no' genteel and discreet enough. Oh, I maun try to be genteel and discreet. I maun practise hard.

. . . My! I wish I could see them wi'oot spyin'. They're keepin' terrible quate. I hope she hasna spurned him. It must be awfu' aggravatin' to be spurned. . . . Mercy! what's that? He's laughin'—an' she's laughin'!"

And Christina, her self-command giving way, let out a loud, long, hysterical cackle. For a few moments there was a dead silence in the shop, and then Miss Purvis and Mr. Baldwin laughed far louder than before. Christina hid her hot, angry face against the back of the chair. People who could laugh like that could not possibly be in love. It was all up a gum-tree! Alas! Alas!

Miss Purvis came softly into the living-room.

"Christina, my dear," she said, smiling, "Mr. Baldwin wishes to speak to you. He has something to tell you. What's the matter?"

"What's up?" Christina gruffly inquired, her face still hidden.

The spinster gently stroked the girl's hair, and, in a low voice, said—

"It will be a great surprise to you, but—Mr. Baldwin is going to be—your uncle."

"Hooray!" said Christina feebly. She meant to add that it was no surprise to her, but, somehow, a lump came into her throat, and, throwing her arms about her aunt's neck, she gave way to tears.

Ten minutes later, however, she was herself again, making extensive suggestions for the wedding which, Miss Purvis bashfully admitted, might possibly take place in March or April.

THE END

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Leaning negligently against the side of the doorway she crossed one leg over the other, and said in a business-like voice—

"What did ye say was the name o' the pairty?" The maid looked bewildered.

"Wha sent ye?" Christina demanded.

"Mistress MacTougal!—I haf forgot the name of the house. I will haf come to this place last night."

"Mistress MacDougall—Och, I ken about her. Seaview's her hoose. Mind that, so as ye'll no' get lost."

FICHE 3 NOT REQUIRED